Lived Experiences of Patients Admitted to a Rehabilitation Centre for Crystal Methamphetamine Addiction in Masvingo

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Abstract

The overuse of crystal meth is a significant issue that the globe is currently experiencing. In order to gain an understanding of the experiences of crystal meth, substance use, and abusive behaviour, this research utilised a number of different theoretical viewpoints. The study was carried out at Ngomahuru Psychiatric Hospital, a location 52 kilometres south-east of Masvingo town in Zimbabwe. There were five male patients represented among the participants, and their ages ranged from 18 to 40 years old. This research was conducted using a qualitative and exploratory research approach. In addition to observations, data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. Data from the recordings followed a thematic arrangement. Despite the fact that crystal meth was the most commonly misused substance by participants, other substances such as alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana were also uncovered by the research. Such substances were used for a variety of reasons, including personal, familial, social, and environmental considerations. On the other hand, the pressure from one's peers was found to be the most significant influence in crystal meth consumption. This research highlights the distressing nature of substance abuse among individuals who have been hospitalised to the hospital. The research brings to attention the various approaches that can be utilised to combat substance use of crystal meth among young people. In addition, the findings of this study suggest that all relevant authorities should make a concerted effort to address factors that contribute to the problems linked to substance and drug abuse.

Keywords: addiction , patient , dependency , crystal meth and substance misuse

Introduction

The illegal substance known crystal meth has emerged as a drug of choice among all illegal drugs that are currently being abused, according to observations made all around the world (World Drug Report, 2019). Crystal meth is used for a variety of objectives including recreational ones such as pleasure, increased sexual performance, and heightened consciousness, as well as for the goals of production, vigilance, and copying. Crystal meth is a stimulant of the central nervous system. According to Selseng, Follevay, and Aslund (2021), the lived experiences of substance abuse of crystal meth are not well understood in the many settings in which they have been examined. According to the World Drug Report (2019), amphetamines and prescription stimulants were stated to be the third most commonly used drugs worldwide, following marijuana and opioids. Canada, the United States of America, and Australia had the greatest rates of users of these substances. An alarming increase in the use of crystal meth has

been seen, as evidenced by an increase in the presence of toxins in deaths associated with the use of illegal drugs, drug seizures by law enforcement, and hospitalisations related to drugs. According to Papamihali (2021), illicit drug and substance abuse is a phenomena that occurs all over the world. The situation in Zimbabwe, for example, demonstrates that the same pattern is occurring among people who are admitted to psychiatric hospitals. There is a dearth of studies in Zimbabwe concerning the medical effects of crystal meth, with the exception of insomnia that is prolonged or aggravated. It has been estimated that more than twenty-five percent of young people are misusing crystal methamphetamine, which is commonly referred to as *dombo* and *guka* in local Shona language street slang.

It is common knowledge that prescription stimulants are the most widely used narcotics in the world, second only to marijuana, which is the substance that is used the most in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. Over the course of the past few years, there has been an upsurge in the number of cases of crystal meth, methamphetamines-related para suicide, and deaths (Papamihali, 2021) all throughout the majority of these countries. Although it is estimated that over thirty million people around the world are affected by drug use disorders, only three percent of those affected obtain treatment for their problem. By the year 2008, methamphetamine was widely used in South Africa (Parry, 2008, 2016). In Zimbabwe, there is either very little or no knowledge regarding the therapeutic management of this medicine. Crystal meth study is important because it allows researchers to gain an understanding of the effects crystal meth has on patients and to discover therapeutic management techniques that are worthwhile.

Smith (2020) asserts that the consumption of substances "is considered the critical behaviour of interest" since it is believed "both personal factors internal to the individual and environmental factors external to the individual directly impact the likelihood of using drugs". As a consequence of this, a person who has persistently considered taking illegal drugs as a solution to the problem of feeling tense or anxious is more likely to develop an addiction to these substances.

Objective of the study

The major aim of the study was to explore the social experiences of individuals who use crystal meth, with a particular focus on their awareness of the risks associated with drug use and the psychological and social consequences of substance abuse. A key aspect of this investigation involved understanding what constitutes a negative psychological experience within the broader framework of psychiatry as a scientific discipline. Additionally, the investigation sought to assess whether these individuals recognise potential hazards related to their behaviour. To achieve this, the research considered effective methods for evaluating others' awareness of such risks and threats.

Methodology

The investigation was carried out in the acute male ward of Ngomahuru Psychiatric Hospital. The participants were five males, and all of them were between the ages of 18 and 40. The study utilised a

qualitative research design because it gives natural understanding of participants ordeals, including their social aspects in real life settings. This is unlike the quantitative one that focuses on the measurement and examination of casual associations between variables,. but not the processes (Silverman, 1993). According to Yazan (2015), a research design is an overall framework for collecting data. the methodology employed in this study heavily drew from a qualitative paradigm. These methods were used to understand patients' social context even before admittance in this setting. There is a need to understand the behaviour and issues behind users of crystal meth. Understanding is the result of research and is due to an iterative process in which data, concepts and evidence are connected with one another (Becker (2017). Furthermore, the meanings people construct can be established by employing a qualitative research approach. The patients' backgrounds, for example, their families and peers, were considered in order to understand their substance use behaviour. The research questions served as the foundation for the methodologies to be used, and they are covered in more detail later in this section. The qualitative study design also allows the researcher to understand, characterize, and interpret interactions in terms of the meanings that participants assign to them. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research that focusses on an epistemological stance and the use of methods such as narrative descriptive accounts of a setting or practice is considered to be qualitative research. On the other hand, qualitative research that focuses on the process and context of data collection is considered to be situated research as it offers or locates the observer in the world. The focus of qualitative research methods is on the qualitative characteristics of human behaviour (De Vos, 1998; Marshal & Rossman, 1999). The idea is to generate new concepts being guided by the socio-ecological model and the social learning theory. In this study, data was analysed using words rather than graphs and figures (Silverman, 1993). The goal was to highlight the meanings and processes that had been carefully assessed in terms of their intensity and frequency (Nelson, Treicher, & Grossberg, 1992). Willis (2015) says information gathered is analysed using phrases focusing on their similar relationships in meaning. The data discovered was not measured using complicated numbers, percentages, or other quantitative approaches. In this study, qualitative research was also used, with a focus on capturing the patient's perspective through in depth interviews and observations (Nelson et al., 1992). A quantitative approach was not ideal in this juncture because themes from subjects would have emerged rather as quantified expressions without proper understanding of the subjects' lived experiences. The participants' experiences were captured using an mp3 file recorder to capture their tone as well as field notes to record data on motions. It was therefore logical to use qualitative method because research questions required exploration.

Sampling strategy

The study's sample was taken from the hospital's information department where files of admitted patients are kept. The department of information keeps and maintains records of all patients admitted at the hospital. For the purpose of the research, only patients who had been admitted within the last 3

months of this field research were selected. The selected patient files were supposed to meet the diagnosis of substance-induced psychosis on admittance, and readmissions were also considered.

A purposeful sampling method was used to select the participants. Nikolopoulou (2022) states that purposive sampling refers to a group of nonprobability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they have characteristics that you need in your sample. In other words, units are selected "on purpose" in purposive sampling. Patients who take drugs are reluctant to discuss their experiences, hence a purposeful sampling strategy was adopted. Studying of information-rich cases brings insights and understandings rather than empirical generalisations (Newman, 2000; Patton, 2001). Files with a lengthy history, detailed information, and rich history were chosen. These files helped to identify the participants. Patients were again to be selected according to their location, that is, whether they come from either rural or urban areas. The sample in the study consisted of 5 male patients distributed cumulatively between the ages of 18 & 40. A cumulative distribution was selected because a higher number is found in the middle ages. The drug abuse screening test (DAST) 10 was used also for screening patients for the study. The tool concerns information about involvement with drugs not including alcoholic beverages during the past 12 months.

Data collection

Open-ended interviews, unstructured interviews with a guide or schedule, and in-depth interviews are the three basic forms of unstructured interviews (Vos & Rossman 1995). In this research, an interview guide was used for the unstructured interviews. Themes and interview questions were contained in the guide the researcher created for this study. These were based on literature and research questions pertinent to this study. The first section consisted of biographical data, then the second part had more general questions about experiences with substances and perceptions about their use. A sequence was used to ask the questions thereby themes emerged for further analysis. An interview guide was useful because major concepts of the study emerged in a sequence such that important data could not be forgotten. This allowed open ended responses relevant to the research and flexible for participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Any important points were noted as they emerged from the interview.

Participants' profile

Participant number 01 was a 22-year-old patient. He was the first-born child in a family of 4 children. He lived with his parents. He studied up to Ordinary level and obtained 4 subjects. No history of mental illness in the family, both maternal and paternal side. He stated he started to smoke crystal meth due to peer pressure. He started at 18 years.

Participant number 02 was a 24-year-old client. He was the third born in a family of 3 children. He lived with his grandmother in the rural areas. Both parents were deceased. He was the only son in the family. The other two sisters were married and had their own families. He used to steal money from his

grandmother to go and buy crystal meth and marijuana from a local peddler. He knew the effects of abusing and he regretted abusing drugs.

Participant number 03 is a 38-year-old man who is married and lived with his wife and 3 children. His mother passed away and his father was alive, but had remarried. He was a self-employed vendor. He used substances with friends after work and during weekends. There is not known history of mental illness in the family. He ended up having problems with his wife due to substance abuse. Besides crystal meth, he also used spirits and marijuana.

Participant number 04 was a 26-year-old patient who was a second born in a family of three. He had a history of wandering away from home. He used crystal meth, marijuana and alcohol with peers. There was a positive history of mental illness in the family. He abused substances with peers. The substances included alcohol, cigarettes, and crystal meth. He started using substances at 15 years.

Participant number 05 was an 18-year-old male client. He was the firstborn in a family of four. He abused crystal meth. His father passed away and he lived with his mother and other four siblings. He was the only boy in the family. He started using substances at 16 years. He sat for Ordinary level but he did not collect his results. He used substances with his peers from his neighbourhood. There was no history of mental illness in the family, but his father was an alcoholic.

Data analysis

The next section provides an ample description of how the data was analysed in themes. The analyses was done through thematic content analysis (TCA). TCA, according to Cohen and Manion (2013), is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) inside the data. A theme is a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings and usually is the inductive analytic process which characterises the qualitative paradigm. The following steps where used when analysing data using TCA, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2014) specified:

i) Open coding of data: This meant building a set of themes by looking for patterns and meaning produced in the data, labelling and grouping them in connection with the theoretical framework of the research.

ii) Definition of thematic categories: Themes and perspectives could defined across the selected subtexts. These could be in the form of words, sentences or group of sentences. These groups could be predefined by theory. Another method could be reading the selected subtexts a multiple times and defining the themes that emerged from these readings. In this study, a transcript of the research was then made and read through several times. Interesting and relevant information was highlighted when the transcript was read.

iii) Sorting materials into categories: Separate sentences and utterances across the narrative texts were assigned to the relevant nine categories. In this way, different parts of the narratives were grouped under defined thematic categories. The researcher categorised items and then started to link them together from minor to major categories. The wider picture started to emerge. Each transcript was treated in the same manner.

Goals of coding and analysis

The idea or goal of the analysis was to find patterns and distinctions in the male patients' statements regarding abusing crystal meth. The analysis of the data was guided by the works of Aronson (1994), Atride-Stirling (2001), and Braun and Clarke (2016). The codes were completed first. The fundamental concepts and research topics served as the foundation for these codes. This was done in order to keep the study's focus intact. Following the process of identifying codes, all of the issues covered by those codes were identified and gathered under the column of topics covered. The themes that were found in the interview transcripts of every participant were used to support the problems discussed. Coherent groups were created from the identified topics

The study explored the experiences, motivations, and consequences associated with crystal meth use among participants. The findings revealed a range of emotional, social, psychological, and physical effects, as well as the underlying reasons for initiating and sustaining the habit.

Results

Emotional and social factors

Loneliness emerged as a key factor influencing the initiation of drug use. Several participants reported using crystal meth to overcome feelings of isolation and to form new friendships. Some described increased social networks after using the substance, suggesting that social connection served as both a motivation and a reinforcement for continued use.

Awareness of harm and desire to quit

Despite continued use, most participants demonstrated awareness of the harmful effects of crystal meth. They cited damage to vital organs such as the brain, lungs, and liver, as well as general physical deterioration. Many expressed a strong desire to stop using, acknowledging the negative impact of the drug and the need for change. However, they also recognised the challenges of quitting.

Psychological and physical effects

The use of crystal meth was associated with significant psychological disturbances, particularly paranoia and insomnia. Participants frequently reported experiencing fear, mistrust, and the belief that others intended to harm them. Extended use also disrupted normal sleep patterns, with many stating that they were unable to sleep for several days after continuous use.

Motivations for use

Peer influence was a dominant motivator in the initiation of drug use. Friends, classmates, and neighbours were often identified as sources of exposure or encouragement. Participants also reported using crystal meth for enjoyment, excitement, and mood enhancement. Many described feelings of increased confidence, alertness, and energy while under the influence.

Impact on relationships and education

Crystal meth use had a detrimental effect on personal relationships and academic engagement. Participants reported losing trust from family members, becoming estranged from parents, and engaging in theft to sustain their habit. Educational outcomes were similarly affected, with several users indicating that drug use led to poor performance, school dropout, and a general loss of interest in learning.

Stress and emotional relief

While some participants initially experienced temporary stress relief from drug use, this effect was short-lived. Over time, stress and anxiety increased, suggesting that the substance provided only momentary emotional escape, followed by intensified psychological distress.

Perceived positives and social behaviour

A few participants noted short-term positive effects, such as a euphoric state, reduced worry, and an increased sense of freedom. However, these benefits were temporary and largely confined to interactions within user groups, limiting social integration outside drug-using circles.

Approaches to quitting and recovery

Participants identified changes in environment, social circles, and lifestyle as key strategies for recovery. Many believed that relocating or forming new, non-using friendships could support cessation efforts, highlighting the importance of environmental and social change in overcoming addiction.

Health consequences and reasons for use

Crystal meth use was found to result in serious health effects, including damaged lungs, addiction, hangovers, and in severe cases, death. Reasons for use were multifaceted and included peer pressure, entertainment, imitation of role models, stress relief, and media influence.

Means of sustaining the habit

To maintain access to the drug, users relied on various means such as pocket money, friendships, stealing, and gambling. These coping mechanisms reveal the economic strain and behavioural risks associated with long-term substance dependency.

Thematic overview

The data reflected three broad thematic categories: maintaining the habit, experiencing the effects of substance abuse, and seeking solutions. These were linked to financial dependency, health deterioration,

social disconnection, and academic decline. Collectively, the themes underscore the pervasive impact of crystal meth use on users' physical health, social relationships, and overall well-being.

Discussion of findings

The results of this study brought to light a few problems that need to be resolved if admitted patients are to stop abusing crystal meth. In the three tables above. It was clear to understand how crystal meth abuse affected the sample of abusers. The tables also disclose the data gathered infuses with the objectives of the study. That is:

(i) Effects of crystal meth abuse was associated with health, that is, mainly addiction, ill health, damaged lungs, hangover and death

(ii) Social experiences of meth abusers included the need for entertainment, for example, by use of role models, leading to peer pressures amongst friends.

(iii) Manner of acting of crystal meth abusers, for example, to maintain habit, stealing, gambling, and friends were the main drivers into continued use of the drug.

According to Goldstein (2015), if the effects of drugs are dependent upon the use setting, then some assessments of social norms of the respondent's salient reference groups should be valuable. A changing world means that assessments of usage must be periodically reconceptualized. Patients use both legal and illegal substances. Substance abuse among adolescents is caused by personal, family, and environmental factors. Substance abuse does not only affect the person using them, they also affect other people. Their use of substances endangers the lives of both their families and other people in their communities (Donald et al., 2007). Thus, substance abuse by patients has health, economic and social implications. The study's conclusion, limitations, and recommendations are discussed here. This part also makes reference to my own personal thoughts on this subject.

Figure 1: Mateveke crystal meth model 16

The crystal meth issue has an impact on everyone. Therefore, it necessitates the efforts of all parties involved, including patients and all youth, in order to be addressed. It is disappointing that patients rely on this medication to operate as intended before admission. They viewed crystal meth as a crutch, a portal to happiness, a catalyst, or a social lubricant that made it simple for them to function—but only for a short time. Observing young people using this substance and becoming so severely dependent on it is upsetting, discouraging, and sad. They should be loved, mentored, and supported since they will be the future leaders of our nation. This will help them deal with their behaviour related to abusing crystal meth and prevent them from abusing other substances in the future, which will negatively affect their lives, as stated under the effects of substances. Additionally, since all male patients were affected by these issues, other health, wellness, career, and vocational training ideas were covered during group sessions in the department; in addition to substance abuse issues. The objectives of this study, which included examining the causes of male patients abusing crystal meth and the intricacies of substance misuse among a small group of 17 patients hospitalised at the Ngomahuru Psychiatric Hospital, were successfully met. Some of the objectives included determining their understanding of chemicals and their effects; figuring out how boys and men live in their social surroundings and coming up with prevention measures for male substance misuse.

Conclusion

The patients hospitalized to the Ngomahuru Psychiatric Hospital were going through a critical period in their development. They experienced pressure from their social surroundings and relatives. Additionally, they were susceptible to peer and role model pressures from the environment. Patients' voices in this study unmistakably stated that they were consuming crystal meth for a variety of reasons; and that they required assistance to stop the behaviour. Members of communities ought to fight against using crystal meth. In addition, parents, educators, health professionals, community leaders, psychologists, social workers, and the general public must be at the forefront of this struggle.

Recommendations for future research

In order to increase the generalisability of the results, it is advised that a bigger sample, including female participants, be drawn for future studies. Any future research ought to consider covering a larger geographic area. Additionally, new studies should include males and females who are not admitted to the institution, including students at colleges and universities. Additionally, it is advised that, in addition to face-to-face interviews, participants be given the opportunity to record all other relevant thoughts they find challenging to express in conversation with the interviewer. As an alternative, parents can be enlisted to participate in questionnaires or interviews in order to gain a more comprehensive as they are significant stakeholders required to understand crystal meth misuse among young people. Any other significant parties involved in programmes that address adolescent substance abuse in urban and rural areas could also provide information.

Training and development

The majority of participants chose vocational training over traditional schooling, according to this study's findings. They wanted to acquire skills in addition to formal schooling. The majority of them quit school or failed their ordinary level studies, making it impossible for them to advance. Some sat the exams multiple times, but only managed to pass one to three subjects. Additionally, because the majority of patients claimed they did not want to sleep, they used crystal meth to extend their time spent looking for money. This demonstrates that they were prepared for careers rather than education, which is what most parents prioritise for their children.

The best jobs are those that need teamwork because everyone seems to be influenced by peers to engage in harmful behaviours like substance addiction. Positive behaviours may benefit from the social learning that occurs from peers. Again, the government might develop initiatives in the neighbourhoods to stop these young people from consuming crystal meth. These could include outdoor pursuits like sports and other revenue-generating endeavours. All intervening programmes described above must be supervised if they are implemented. However, monitoring these programmes can be difficult. Therefore, hiring experts in the design and implementation of evaluation procedures is necessary. Government agencies, non-governmental organisations, commercial consultants, and institutions of higher education may offer these services as part of their community outreach initiatives (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019).

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