

FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR ESTABLISHING MEDICATION-ASSISTED TREATMENT PROGRAM IN NIGERIA

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Background:

In Nigeria, 90% of high-risk drug users are opioid-dependent and 38% of injecting drug users in a recently concluded needle syringe pilot program, reported needle-sharing practices. There is a glaring risk of HIV transmission and other blood-borne diseases and a critical need to address the escalating public health crisis associated with opioid misuse and its dire consequences. The 2020 IBBSS reveals a persistently high HIV prevalence of 10.9% among people who inject drugs (PWID), which significantly surpasses the 1.4% prevalence rate in the general population. In addressing opioid use disorder, Nigeria has developed programs and policies to support evidenced-based interventions and the implementation of the comprehensive package of harm reduction interventions, of which Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) is one. Thus, this study seeks to explore the feasibility and potential impact of implementing MAT as a crucial harm reduction strategy to combat the opioid crisis in Nigeria and alleviate the associated health and societal burdens.

Methods:

The study took place in Abia, Gombe, and Oyo states of Nigeria. It used a mixed methods design that included 12 focus group discussions, 32 key information interviews and cross-sectional surveys involving 109 consenting PWIDs above 18 years and stakeholders, such as law enforcement officers, traditional and religious leaders, drug treatment experts, community-based service providers, and policy makers. Data obtained were transcribed, re-translated, and analyzed using Atlas ti version 9 for content analysis. Quantitative data analysis was done using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 27 and the results were presented in simple frequencies.

Results:

Drug use was prevalent and associated with various criminal problems. The accessibility to care for individuals with substance use disorders is influenced by factors such as transportation, availability of treatment services, and presence of stigma in these communities. Notably, drug users are often perceived as both individuals in need of assistance and as potential criminals. The legal and policy framework in Nigeria, was found to be adequate for the implementation of MAT. All drug users (100%) expressed acceptance, appropriateness, and feasibility of MAT as an intervention. However, several key challenges were identified, including issues related to funding, the criminalization of drug use, and the management of opioid medication supply chains. It was further revealed that drug users favored a community-based approach for the implementation of MAT services. These findings underscore the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses these challenges and promotes a more supportive environment for individuals seeking MAT services in these communities.

Conclusion:

MAT is an acceptable and feasible treatment option for individuals struggling with opioid use disorder. Addressing the barriers to implementing MAT may lead to improved overall functioning and quality of life of individuals with opioid use disorders.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: