

The perception of Nigerian Youths on the Prevalence of HIV/AIDS. A Case of Tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome or acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a disease of the human immune system caused by the Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV). This condition progressively reduces the effectiveness of the immune system and leaves individuals susceptible to opportunistic infections and tumours. This article describes the perception of Nigerian Youths on the Prevalence of HIV/AIDS, a case of Tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome or acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a disease of the human immune system caused by the Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV). This condition progressively reduces the effectiveness of the immune system and leaves individuals susceptible to opportunistic infections and tumours. Wikipedia (2009) maintained that genetic research indicates that HIV originated in West-central Africa during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. AIDS was first discovered by the U.S centres for disease control and prevention in 1981 and its cause, HIV, identified in the early 1980's.

UNDP (2009) viewed the abbreviation HIV as a virus that infects cells of the human Immune system and destroys or impairs their function. Infection with this virus results in the progressive deterioration of the immune system leading to immune deficiency. The immune system is considered deficient, when it can no longer fulfil its role of fighting infections and diseases. Immuno deficient people are more susceptible to a wide range of infections, most of which are rare among people without immune deficiency. Infections associated with severe immuno deficiency are known as opportunistic infections; because they take advantage of a weakened immune system.

Wikipedia (2009) gave a list of opportunistic infections to include: gastrointestinal infections, neurological and psychiatric involvement, tumours and malignancies, pulmonary infections, low grade fevers, weight loss, and acute diarrhoea. Opportunistic infections are common in people with AIDS. People with AIDS have an increased risk of developing cancers such as Kaposi's Sacroma, cervical cancer, and cancers of the immune system known as Lymphomas. Additionally, people with

AIDS often have systemic symptoms of infection like fevers, sweat (particularly at night) swollen glands, chills, weakness and weight loss. The specific opportunistic infections that AIDS patient develop depend in part on the prevalence of these infections in the geographic area in which the patient lives. HIV/AIDS spread occurs through several modes of transmission. Wikipedia (2009) identified three modes of transmitting HIV/AIDS to include sexual transmission, exposure to blood and lymph borne pathogens and perinatal transmission. Transmission of HIV/AIDS through sexual contact is higher than the other means of transmission as reported by the writer. Other sexually transmitted infections increased the risk of HIV transmission and infection, because they cause the disruption of the normal epithelial barrier by genital ulceration and/or micro ulceration, and by the accumulation of pools of HIV susceptible or HIV infected cells in semen and vaginal secretions. The author further stressed that a number of misconceptions have arisen surroundings HIV/AIDS. Three of the most common misconceptions are: that AIDS can spread through casual contact, that sexual intercourse with a virgin will cure AIDS, and that HIV can infect only homosexual men and drug users. Other misconceptions are that any act of anal intercourse between gay men can lead to AIDS infection and that open discussion of homosexuality and HIV in schools will lead to increased rates of homosexuality and AIDS.

Abiona (2006) stated that Human Immune Deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) has spread to every nation since it was reported two decades ago. Africa, and indeed Nigeria, has suffered the devastating effect of the ravaging virus. The international bodies have been putting in extra efforts through researches,

seminars, workshops and direct assistance to the general public and, especially to the victims in order to curtail the spread. Efforts are also geared towards finding solutions to the problem. In effect, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nation (UN), world Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) have given support to national governments for advocacy to stop the spread. The government of Nigeria has taken up the challenge and set up the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) with the support of UNAIDS and state of the federation. The emphasis is on preventive education, especially through the Ministry of Education at the Federal and State level. The Pan American Health Organisation (2009) outlined a lot of stigmatization and discrimination accorded HIV/AIDS patient. These include community discrimination which are actions or in actions in less formal contexts, such as the workplace or social settings such as market places, sports centre or bars, and legislative discrimination enshrined in law or policy. The document stated that in Venezuela, higher rates of discriminatory attitudes occur among dentists (45%), nurses (46%) doctors and students (42%). In the city of Cochabamba, in Bolivia, high levels of ignorance about HIV/AIDS diagnosis and treatment occur among health workers. More than one third of 305 respondents were afraid of HIV/AIDS patients and believed they should be isolated. In the Dominican Republic, nearly one third of surgeons reported feeling of anxiety over treating HIV patients and one in 10 said they did not accept HIV positive patients. Other forms of discrimination include: refusal to admit patients, treatment delayed or withheld, non- attendance to patients in beds, testing without consent, breach of confidentiality, inappropriate comments or behaviour, selective use of universal precautions and use of excessive precautions among others. Although treatments for AIDS and HIV can slow the course of the disease, there is currently no vaccine or drugs for the cure of the ailment. Antiretroviral treatment reduces both the mortality and morbidity of the HIV infection, but these drugs are expensive and routine access to antiretroviral medication is not available in all countries. Due to the difficulty in treating HIV infection, preventing infection is a key measure in controlling AIDS. Abiona (2006) maintained that HIV/AIDS has devastating effects on the economic status of the infected and affected persons by accelerating poverty, preventing good health, retarding good and quality education, as well as social and political progress of nations. The rate of

HIV/AIDS spread in ravaging like a wild forest fire during the harmattan season. Abiona (2006) stated that in 2002, about 5 million people acquired HIV, 3 million died while 42 million people are living with the virus out of which 3.6 million are Nigerians. So far, about 1.7 million Nigerians have died of the disease. Due to new discoveries, HIV/AIDS patient can now live longer and be active as every other human being. However, managing the disease causes financial, social and emotional disorder of the infected and affected. Since the inception of the disease HIV/AIDS, people have various ideas, beliefs and knowledge of the understanding of its existence and prevalence within the society. This study therefore focuses on the perception of Nigerian youths on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. The study is aimed at ascertaining the belief of Nigerian youths on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our society and also to determine how the knowledge of HIV/AIDS affects their sexual behaviour. This study was conducted in tertiary institutions in Imo State Nigeria.

Research questions

Two research questions guided this study:

- (i) What is the belief of Nigerian youths on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our society?
- (ii) How does the understanding of Nigerian youths about HIV/AIDS prevalence affect their sexual behaviour?

Methodology

The study employs the survey research design. A sample of 150 students drawn from three tertiary institutions in Imo State was used for the study. A 10 item four point Likert-type questionnaire sectioned into two parts to elicit opinion on the belief of Nigerian youths on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our society and how their understanding about HIV/AIDS affect their sexual behaviour was used to collect data. Scores were awarded to the responses on the questionnaire as follows: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1. The mean of the responses is 2.5. As such the mean of any response that is greater than 2.5 is a positive response while the mean of any response that is less than 2.5 is a negative response. The questionnaire was administered to the students in the institutions and collected after their responses.

Research question 2: How does the understanding of Nigerian youths about HIV/AIDS affect their sexual behaviour?

Table 1: beliefs of Nigerian youths on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our society.

S/no	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X
i.	Unprotected sex facilitates the spread of HIV/AIDS.	320	150	24	18	512	3.41
ii.	HIV/AIDS is no longer a killer disease.	16	96	142	43	297	1.98
iii.	Sexual intercourse is not the ultimate means of contacting HIV/AIDS.	92	132	8	28	336	2.24
iv.	HIV/AIDS campaign is a way of discouraging young people from enjoying themselves.	4	27	80	60	171	1.14
v.	HIV/AIDS is like other diseases that attack man.	148	192	54	88	482	3.21
Vi	HIV/AIDS is a Western idea of Controlling population in the Third world.	8	72	138	65	283	1.88

Cumulative mean = $13.88/6 = 2.31$

Result of table 1 above shows that Nigerian youths have good perception on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our society as exemplified by their response to questions raised in the table.

Table 2: Understanding of Nigerian youths about HIV/AIDS and effect on sexual behaviour.

S/no	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X
i.	HIV/AIDS have curtailed the rate of immorality in the society.	68	297	40	14	414	2.76
ii.	HIV/AIDS knowledge discourage multiple sexual partners.	172	279	22	3	476	3.17
iii.	The knowledge of HIV/AIDS have changed the orientation of youths towards casual sex.	156	264	38	4	462	3.08
iv.	The attitude of my peer group towards HIV/AIDS prevalence influences my sexual behaviour.	56	258	82	9	405	2.70

Cumulative mean = $11.71/4 = 2.92$

The result of table 2 above shows that all the responses have mean greater than 2.5 and a cumulative mean of 2.92 showing that Nigerian youth have positive disposition towards the knowledge of HIV/AIDS and control their sexual behaviour in that regard.

Results

The results of data collected were presented and analysed below.

Research question 1: what are the beliefs of Nigerian youths on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our society?

Discussion findings

The findings of this research as shown in the table 1 indicate that Nigerian youths have positive belief towards the existence of HIV/AIDS in our society. The youths are fully aware that unprotected sex facilitate the spread of HIV/AIDS, HIV/AIDS is a killer disease, HIV/AIDS is real and that HIV/AIDS campaign is not a way of discouraging sex or controlling population in the third World as insinuated before now. This result shows that the setting up of National Action Campaign on AIDS, States action campaign on AIDS, and Local Action Campaign on AIDS are yielding positive results in their awareness campaign. Also, the result of table 2 shows that the understanding of Nigerian youths about HIV/AIDS has curtailed the rate of Immorality in the society, discourage multiple sexual partners, changed the orientation of youths towards casual sex and enable them controls their sexual urge. This is a welcome development, since the greater the awareness the larger the chance of contacting the disease and the less the spread.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this research, the follow recommendations were made:

- (i) Government and Voluntary agencies should intensify the campaign on HIV/AIDS so that the awareness can reach every members of the society.
- (ii) The school should continue to enlighten the students on the existence and dangers of HIV/AIDS.
- (iii) Religious groups should organize seminars for its followers on the scourge of HIV/AIDS.
- (iv) Couple should be faithful to themselves to reduce their chance of being infected with HIV.

Conclusion

The fight against HIV/AIDS control is a continuous process until a lasting solution is attained in curing the ailment. Both the government and the members of the society should continue with the campaign to sensitize the populace about the dangers of contacting the disease. We shall not rest on our oars until the menace is kicked out of our society.

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