

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND AWARENESS OF HIV/AIDS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN OWERRI, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This is a questionnaire study of the awareness knowledge and attitude of four hundred and seventy seven students in eight randomly selected primary schools in Owerri metropolis. The study revealed a very high level of awareness. The commonest sources of information were the mass media (television and radio) 47.1 %, and teachers 22.8%. Sexual intercourse and blood transfusion were identified as modes of transmission by 84.7% and 92.9% of the students. Generally the high level of awareness was not matched by accurate knowledge as 71.7% and 76.1% mentioned physical contact and mosquito bites respectively as modes of transmission. There was a marked negative attitude to people with the disease with only 56.8% wanting them to be treated like others. It is concluded that although the media have succeeded in creating awareness the next phase of the campaign against HIV/AIDS should concentrate on providing more detailed knowledge by the introduction of sexuality education in the primary school curriculum.

KEYWORDS: HIV/AIDS, Knowledge, Awareness, Attitude, Primary school children.

INTRODUCTION

Since its discovery in 1981 in the United States of America (MMWR, 1981) HIV/AIDS has grown from a relatively unknown disease to a pandemic, feared and dreaded particularly in the developing countries. It has become one of the most important diseases and causes of death in African women. Currently the spread in the developing countries continues largely unabated aided by illiteracy, polygamy and lack of commitment by many governments. Currently over 36 million people are living with the disease world wide (UNAIDS, 2000) and of these 90 % are in the developing world where treatment is largely unsatisfactory. Studies have been done to evaluate the level of awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS in Africa but these have been restricted largely to older adolescents in secondary and tertiary institutions adults and pregnant women (Oyo-Ita et al, 2005, Igwegbe et al 2005, Ugochukwu, 2003) However the age of sexual debut is decreasing (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1992) and may occur even

before the age of eleven (Anochie et al, 2001). Risky sexual habits with multiple sexual partners are also common in the young (Araoye, 1982). In fact the first case of HIV/AIDS was described in a thirteen year old girl (Rukujei, 1996). Education and prevention should therefore start early. It is therefore extremely important to explore the knowledge, attitude, awareness in primary schools as results will provide information for designing strategies that will stem the tide of the disease.

METHOD

Owerri is a town in the South Eastern part of Nigeria with a population of two hundred and ninety thousand. It has twenty three primary schools with a total enrollment of 17 421 pupils with 2 229 pupils in the last two classes (primaries five and six) Out of these, eight primary schools were randomly selected. To achieve a representative sample of the students a minimum sample size of 400 was needed (Krejce & Morgan 1970).

Permission for the study was obtained from

the headmasters of the schools. Subsequently five hundred structured pretested questionnaires were administered in December 2006, by the teachers and a research assistant to students in the last two classes (primary 5 and primary 6) of the schools selected. The study was anonymous and the participants sat apart while their teachers made sure that the questionnaires were completed independently. Each questionnaire had thirty questions. The first section contained demographic details while the rest comprised questions on awareness, recognition, prevention, modes of transmission and attitude to HIV/AIDS.

RESULTS

Four hundred and seventy seven (95.4%) of the submitted questionnaires were suitable for analysis. Of these 253 were males and 224 were female, giving a male-female ratio of 1.1:1.0. Their ages ranged from 8 to 15 with a mean of 11.6yrs.

Awareness

All students were aware of HIV/AIDS.

Sources of Information (Table 2)

The main source of information was television (29.1%) followed by teachers (22.8%) and radio (17.2%) while parents, books and billboards ranked very low.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to age and sex

Age	No of Respondents	%
8	14	2.9
9	41	8.6
10	117	24.5
11	108	22.7
12	97	20.4
13	62	13.0
14	21	4.4
15	13	2.7
Not stated	4	0.8
Total	477	100.0
SEX		
MALE	253	53
FEMALE	224	47

Table 2: Sources of Information about HIV/AIDS

SOURCE	Number	%
Television	130	29.1
Teachers	102	22.8
Radio	77	17.2
Hospital Sources	73	16.3
Friends	32	7.2
Churches	21	4.7
Parents	7	1.6
Books	3	0.7
Billboards	2	0.4
Total	477	100

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS (Table 3)
 One hundred and thirty one (27.5%) of the students said that the disease could be recognized by sight. Knowledge of modes of transmission was good with 84.7%, 92.9% and 93.5% correctly mentioning sexual intercourse, blood transfusion and shaving razors respectively. Pregnancy was mentioned as a mode of transmission by

86.7% of students, while kissing, physical contact and mosquito bites were mentioned as transmission routes by 65.4, 71.7 and 76.1 % of the students respectively. Condom use, abstinence and prayers were mentioned by 53.2, 65.6 and 46.5% of the students respectively while 19.3% thought antibiotics could be preventive.

Table 3: Knowledge on HIV/AIDS

	YES (%)	NO	DON'T KNOW
(YES)			
Knowledge of HIV/AIDS	477 (100)	0	0
Recognition by sight	131 (27.5)	311	35
TRANSMISSION ROUTES			
Sexual intercourse	404(84.7)	37	36
Blood transfusion	443(92.9)	24	10
Shaving razors	446(93.5)	22	14
Pregnancy	414 (86.4)	51	12
Kissing	312(65.4)	153	12
Physical contact	342(71.7)	118	17
Mosquito bite	363(76.1)	103	11
Heredity	106(22.2)	355	16
POSSIBILITY OF CURE			
Can be cured	85(17.8)	378	14
METHODS OF PREVENTION			
Condom Use	254(53.2)	211	12
Abstinence	313 (65.6)	137	27
Prayers	222(46.5)	243	12
Antibiotics	93(19.5)	337	47

Table 4

Attitude to HIV/AIDS

	YES	NO (%)	DON'T KNOW
Treat them like others	199	271(56.8)	7
Can share a room	199	273(57.2)	5
Will eat from same plate	193	280(58.7)	4

Attitude to HIV/AIDS

Two hundred and seventy one (56.8%) of the students felt they should not be treated like others while 57.2% will not share a room with them, 58.7% will not eat from the same plate.

DISCUSSION

This study shows a very high level of awareness of HIV/AIDS and some modes of transmission .The mass media (television and radio) and teachers play a great part in the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information while parents and churches lag far behind. Good knowledge especially with regards to transmission and prevention is demonstrated and the existence of unsatisfactory attitude towards patients of the disease is confirmed.

The high level of awareness is similar to the finding in other studies (Fawole et al 1999; Okediji et al 1989)and is probably due to government and NGO assisted public enlightenment campaigns. The important role played by the mass media and teachers in disseminating information about the disease seen here has also been reported by Oyo-Ita,et al (2005) and Campbell and Mbizvo (1994) . Asuzu,et al (1989) have shown that youths prefer their parents as sex educators . In this study parents were responsible for creating awareness in only 1.7% of the respondents. This was similar to the finding of 2.2% of awareness attributed to parents in Oyo-Ita et al's (2005) work .This may result from the fact that traditionally adults do not discuss sexual matters with young people because of the erroneous impression that it will encourage promiscuity (Araoye,et al 2005).The poor role of churches and books is also amply demonstrated.

Paradoxically as has been demonstrated (Anochie & Ikpeme, 2003; Klepp & Lugoe, 1999; and Odujinrin&Akinkuade ,1991) the high level of awareness observed is not matched by a similar level of accurate knowledge about HIV/AIDS. For instance physical contact and mosquito bites are mentioned as modes of transmission by a high percentage 71.7 % and 76.1 % respectively of respondents. Similarly condom use and abstinence were

only mentioned as means of prevention by 53.2 and 65.6% of the students. Prayer as a method of prevention was mentioned by 46.5% of students.

There is still a high level of intolerance of victims of the disease .Only 56.8% of the students would want them treated like others while more than half would neither share a room nor eat from the same plate. Similar findings were made by Oyo -Ita et al (2005). The superficial knowledge of students demonstrated by this study suggests a need for a review of strategy as television and radio jingles have failed to produce the desired indepth knowledge. Neither have they brought about desirable attitudinal change. The fact that teachers play a significant role in providing information albeit incorrect suggests that they too may also need to be trained (Klepp et al 1997).

There is also a need for more detailed instruction of students in primary schools to correct the deficiencies in knowledge demonstrated. This may involve introduction of sexuality and HIV/AIDS education into the school curriculum. The use of youth peer education and drama have been found to be effective (Araoye et al 2005, Harvey& Tong, 2000) These measures will influence the children positively , thus stemming the tide of HIV/AIDS.

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