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STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF, AND ATTITUDE TO HIV/AIDS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INFORMATION PROVIDERS

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INTRODUCTION

Like a wild fire, the scourge of HIV/AIDS is consuming the world populace especially in the Sub-Saharan Africa where 25.4m of 39.4m of the world's population who are living with HIV dwell (UNAIDS 2004b). Furthermore, the scourge is more pronounced in women and children than any other groups. Statistics show that of the number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa-3.1m (12.20%) - are adults between 15 - 49 years; 290, 000 are children between 0 - 14 years while 1,900,000 are women aged 15 - 49. Death toll for Adults and children as shown for HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa 2003 statistics stands at 310,000 (UNAIDS, 2004 d).

The situation is quite alarming in Nigeria with 3.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS and ranking 3rd in the world, with children and young people being mostly affected. (Financial Express 2006). Such a situation is not without concern to the world at large and the local community in particular. Hence, government and nongovernmental organizations are making frantic contributions in the areas of finance and research to help address the spread of HIV/AIDS which presently has no cure. To demonstrate commitment to the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS, UNGASS declaration of commitment to the action on HIV/AIDS was signed by 189 members of the United Nations in June 2001. The United States President, George Bush requested that \$ 2.8 billion of the USA budget be set aside to fight AIDS. He also set aside fund for the project termed **President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)** for universities in Nigeria (Department of State, United States of America, 2005). Further to that, his wife, Lady Laura Bush has announced a donation of \$163 million from her country to Nigeria in 2006 to help reduce the spread of this dreadful disease (Financial Express, 2006). The Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo is not without concern. Osotimechin (2006) stated that he, the President directed that 10% of the country's \$ 18 billion debt relief be used in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

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These efforts are well geared towards creation of awareness, change of attitude and belief which can be achieved through the provision of information. With information, people can be educated and awareness created on **how and why HIV is transmitted, who is at risk and what can be done to prevent the spread of the disease** (NCLS 2005). Information services of this nature are provided when information on the needs of the community is ascertained to reveal the trends within that community. Many of the 13 universities in Nigeria which benefited from the \$220,000 PEPFAR grant conducted such needs assessment to determine knowledge, attitudes, practices and the prevalence of risk factor amongst the staff, students and other members of the university community. Need assessment is also very vital in the university environment where population falls within the 20 – 24 years age group which, according to the 2003 Sero-prevalence survey, has the highest prevalence rate of HIV in Nigeria (Department of State, United States of America 2005). The study by MacPhail & Campbell (2001) noted that young people have continued to engage in high risk sex in spite of their knowledge of HIV/AIDS and how to prevent it.

Some research has been carried out on the awareness and behaviour of students towards HIV/AIDS. Phloghof (2005) noted that the University of Botswana undergraduates know what HIV/AIDS is but recommended the continuous need for awareness. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (1990) noted earlier that one in every five hundred college students is infected with HIV in America. Their study involving 24 Colleges in America shows that 2% of the students are infected with HIV. According to the study, students are at risk due to peer pressure, lack of maturity and alcohol/drug use. In their own study of undergraduates of Nigerian university, Hawking et al (n.d) discovered that the students were knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS transmission and symptomatology, but such knowledge did not prevent them from engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse. The work shows that the students' sources of HIV/AIDS information is the media rather than school and homes. The research works suggested that the prevention of HIV/AIDS spread should focus on awareness through information provision and education.

Although many universities have engaged in a series of awareness campaigns sponsored by government and nongovernmental organizations, no such programme has been organized in Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). A study of this nature will not only provide the University Management with the justification to

provide HIV/AIDS awareness programme in the University but will also sensitize government on the need to mandate universities in Nigeria to commence HIV/AIDS programmes. That will also direct the university libraries on the areas of assistance as information providers in the university.

Hence this need assessment study was carried out in FUTO to:

- i. ascertain students awareness' of HIV/AIDS;
- ii. determine their attitude towards the prevention of HIV/AIDS;
- iii. seek their opinion on ways of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS; and
- iv. make recommendations on what the library and the university should do to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The study is a descriptive research. A sample was obtained from undergraduate students' population of the Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. Questionnaires made up of thirteen items were distributed to 1000 students during the students' annual registration exercise in the Library. The students were sampled randomly by providing every even-numbered student that came for registration with the questionnaire. 906 (90.60%) of the distributed questionnaires were returned. Seventeen (17) of the thirty six (36) States in Nigeria and Abuja were indicated as the students' places of domicile. 75.49% and 22.50% of the returned instrument were completed by male and female students respectively. The percentage of the students who returned their questionnaire from the five schools includes 31.34% from the School of Agricultural and Agricultural Technology (SAAT), 60.66% from the School of Engineering and Engineering Technology (SEET), 19.15% from the School of Science (SOSC), 4.44% from the School of Management Technology (SMAT) and 2.3% from the School of Health Technology (SOHT). Students who returned their questionnaire from the first to the fifth academic levels were represented by 21.50%, 19.65%; 21.38%; 20.11% and 17.34% respectively. The data was collated and results presented using percentages and tables.

III. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The results of the survey were organized based on the focus of the study, namely; the background of the students' awareness of the HIV/AIDS, their attitude towards the disease and their input towards the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS.

i. Background of the Students

The background information relating to the number of undergraduates registered in the Library, the number of students sampled, their sex and average age was collated and presented in Table I. This table shows that 6,200 undergraduate students with average age of 21.6 are registered with the library. 1000 students were sampled and 906 representing 90.60% of the students returned the questionnaire. 684 of the students who returned the questionnaire are male while 222 are female. Of the students who returned their questionnaire 21.50% are in the third, fourth and fifth levels respectively. It is very necessary to indicate that the students' major source of information in the University is the University library. Cognizance of the fact that they have no departmental library, only one internet centre and the University is situated 30km away from the city where other libraries and Internet facilities are available should be taken.

	Registered in Library	Sampled Returned		SEX		AGE
				MALE	FEMALE	
SAAT	620	120	117	684	222	21.6
SEET	3,100	550	532			
SMAT	496	50	32			
SOSC	1,860	250	205			
SOHT	124	30	20			
TOTAL	6,200	1000	906	906		

Table 1: Background of the students indicating number: registered with the Library, sampled and returned, gender and average age of the students.

ii. Students Awareness of HIV/AIDS

The students were required to indicate whether they have heard about HIV/AIDS or not. Almost all the students (99.07%) admitted having heard of the disease. To ascertain how knowledgeable they are, they were asked to indicate the full meaning of the HIV/AIDS. The result show that 514 (57.23%) and 690 (76.15%) got the full meaning of HIV/AIDS respectively.

The result also shows that about half of the students (male 58.62% and female 50.90%) know the meaning of HIV. However, knowledge of the full meaning of AIDS follows the same inclination of being higher than that of HIV, 72.38% and 87.83% for male and female respectively. Their knowledge based on School also revealed the same trend but it will be noted that all the respondents from SOHT know the meaning of HIV/AIDS and the highest percentage of respondents who know the meaning of HIV (71.42%) based on schools came from the School. This is expected since the nature of their programme may have exposed them to courses related to the disease. Responses based on academic level shows that students' knowledge of the meaning of HIV/AIDS tends to decrease as they move higher in their academic level with those at the 500 level having the lowest knowledge of the meaning of HIV/AIDS. This situation is worrisome as the reverse was expected to be the case since the senior students are expected to be more knowledgeable and to mentor the junior ones in this area.

The result, however, reveals that all the students have heard about HIV/AIDS. But more of the students know the meaning of AIDS than of HIV.

iii Sources of HIV/AIDS Information

The students were asked to indicate their source of information on HIV/AIDS. The result is presented in Table 2. The result shows that 71.96% of the students obtained their information from the media, 45.58% got theirs through reading, and 17.66% acquired their own knowledge from their friends/classmates, while 15.01% and 12.91% gain theirs from parents and lecturers respectively.

Sources of information	Response	
	Frequency	Percentage
Friends/Classmates	160	17.66
Parents	136	15.01
Lecturers	717	12.91
Reading	413	45.58
Mass Media	652	71.96

Table 2: Sources of HIV/AIDS Information

IV Means of Transmission And Prevention Of HIV/AIDS

Students were requested to indicate if HIV/AIDS is infectious and its means of transmission. The result is presented in Table 3. The Table shows that 95.87% of the

agreed that it is infectious, while only 4.33% responded negatively. Though the percentage which showed that the disease is not infectious is very low, it is worrisome and can make a lot of impact with regard to the prevention. It also suggests that some people are highly ignorant of HIV/AIDS. The Table also shows that 91.94%, 64.23% and 54.52% of the students agreed that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted through sexual intercourse, use of same syringe and contact with infected person's blood respectively. 1.10% of the respondents still believe that physical contact with the infected person is a means of transmitting HIV/AIDS. This confirms that some of the students are ignorant of issues surrounding HIV/AIDS.

Student responses on whether HIV/AIDS can be prevented demonstrates also that majority of them (95.9%) know that the disease can be prevented as against 5.18% who affirmed that it cannot be prevented. Accepting that it cannot be prevented is a reflection that those students are not taking precautions. Those who maintained that HIV/AIDS can be prevented indicated the means of prevention as abstinence from indiscriminate sex (90.85%), avoiding the use of same syringe with another person (62.44%), avoiding contact with other people's blood (58.49%) and also avoiding physical contact with the infected person (7.50%). The latter response also confirms further poor knowledge by some students of the means of transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Means of Transmission	Response	
	No	Percentage
Sexual Intercourse	833	91.94
Use of same syringe	582	64.23
Contact with infected persons blood	494	54.52
Physical contact	10	1.10

Table 3: Students response on infectiousness and means of HIV/AIDS Transmission

V. Students Attitude towards HIV/AIDS

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they have had HIV/AIDS test. Only 15.097% noted that they have done that, while 84.90% have not. This shows that many have poor knowledge of the need for such test; nobody has encouraged them to do that

to that the facilities are not within the reach of the students. It could also suggest that the students may not be interested in such test.

They were also required to note what they would do if they found themselves being infected with HIV/AIDS. Though 65.56% of the students informed that they will seek medical advice, it was shocking that 36.53%, 18.87%, 14.5%, 3.64% and 2.09%, informed that they would pass it to others, keep it to themselves, leave the university, commit suicide or go for prayers and miracles respectively. Such response has a lot of implication for the transmission and prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS and, therefore, calls for urgent attention by the university and government to combat this suicide attitude.

VI. Precautions

The result also reveals that majority of the students (66.31%) informed that FUTO students are not taking any precaution against HIV/AIDS, while 33.68% insisted that they do. The measures taken by students who affirmed to that include principally abstaining from sexual relationship (60.62%), keeping to one friend (30.66%), discussing HIV/AIDS (18.87%), going for hospital checks (14.56%) and using condom (2.09%). The above responses could be attributed to the few who are taking precautions. But the number of students is highly insignificant compared to the student population in the university.

Those who mentioned that FUTO students participated in indiscriminate sex account for 50.35%; have nonchalant attitude towards HIV/AIDS (53.45%) while others insisted that students engaged in unprotected sex (46.72%), used other people's shaving equipment (40.35%), or they had no relevant education as regards HIV/AIDS (16.28%). The implication of the result is that not many FUTO students are taking precautions against HIV/AIDS and, therefore, are at a high risk of contacting the disease.

Possible ways of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS include

- (a) using mass media, libraries, churches, market places, village and town heads as outlets;
- (b) carrying the campaign to where youths (which are the most active sex groups)

love to go. Such places include party scenes, lecture halls Internet/business/film lending centres including sports arena;

- (c) sponsoring film production and related products like role playing and jingle on HIV/AIDS especially in the institutions of higher learning; and
- (d) distribution of handbills to youths.

Awareness of these preventive measures will help people especially the youths understand, in practical terms, the dangers of HIV AIDS.

The respondents noted that apart from the general awareness programme, education though teaching and learning should be used to avert the spread. This should be in the areas of:

- (a) Workshops, seminars and lectures;
- (b) Provision of information material of attractive formats in school, public and academic libraries;
- (c) Mandatory health/sex education as subject/course of study in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Such action will enable students not only hear about the disease, prevention and risk factors but also to learn about the causes, prevention and the risk factors.

The students were of the opinion that government should look into the welfare of the citizens, avert idleness and reduce the use of sex as a source of livelihood. Government could achieve this by:

- (a) Providing employment opportunities for youths and make admission to higher institutions easier;
- (b) Providing social amenities to the public; and
- (c) Providing recreational facilities for youths and students in higher institutions.

They were also of the view that government should adopt a legal approach to issue and actions which encourage the spread of HIV/AIDS. Some of their suggestions include:

- (a) Making prostitution of any form illegal;
- (b) Prohibiting the importation of pornographic materials into the country; and
- (c) Making provision for strict dress code in the institutions of higher learning.

Their suggestion is seen from the students' perspective that the major source of HIV/AIDS transmission is through sexual relationship which is induced by pornographic materials and indecent dressing.

The students suggested that if government could take some of the under-listed health services approach, the scourge of HIV/AIDS could be reduced:

- (a) Initiation of compulsory HIV/AIDS test for every Nigerian;
- (b) Provision of adequate test centres and facilities at subsidized rate;
- (c) Provision of adequate medical equipment like syringe;
- (d) Promotion of abstinence and discourage the use of condom;
- (e) Making anti Retroviral Drugs available and affordable;
- (f) Discouragement of stigmatization of HIV/AIDS patients;
- (g) Provision of effective counselling for those living with HIV/AIDS; and
- (h) Provision of support to health workers who attend to HIV/AIDS patients.

Ways		Response	
		No	Percentage
General Awareness Approach	Use of mass media, library, market places, churches etc	890	98.23
	Party scene, Lecture halls, Business centre and sports arena	530	58.49
	Distribution of handbills	822	90.72
	Sponsored Film production	720	79.47
Education Approach	Workshops, Seminars and Lecture	850	93.81
	Provision of information resources relating to the disease	903	99.66
	Sex education	562	62.03
Welfare Approach	Providing employment opportunity for youths	903	99.66
	Provision of adequate social amenities	870	96.02
	Provision of recreational facilities for the students	890	98.23
Legal Approach	Prohibition of Prostitution	720	79.47
	Prohibition of the importation of pornographic materials	230	215.38
	Enforcing dress code	180	19.86
Health Services Approach	Compulsory HIV/AIDS test	230	25.38
	Adequate medical equipment	720	79.47
	Promotion of abstinence	150	16.55
	Provision of counselling	900	99.33

Table 4: Students responses to mode of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results have revealed that the students are quite familiar with HIV/AIDS diseases though more people know the meaning of HIV/AIDS. However the source of their information on the subject is a cause for concern as their major source of information is the mass media which, in most cases, may not be available in the course of their

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programme in the University. It implies that either the students are not consulting the resources in the library or that the needed HIV/AIDS information resources are not available in the library. Furthermore, students, lecturers and parents who have not acquired information either through reading or from other sources may not be in the position to pass the information to others. Some of the students are still ignorant of the means of transmission despite the fact that 99.07% of them have heard of the disease. This is a reflection of the inadequacy of their source of information which education (formal or informal) through reading can address.

All the variables identified by the students as ways of preventing HIV/AIDS reflect the important role different types of libraries ranging from school through public to academic have to play in that respect. On the general awareness approach, use of media including library and use of lecture halls and handbills require that the needed materials available in the library can be projected using lecture halls while handbills can be collected and displayed or distributed to students using the library. Education in form of lectures, workshops and seminars are always supported by resources in the library. Library has always been regarded as a social service which provides resources. As such, libraries at any level in this regard are challenged to provide print and electronic resources which will serve for education and for recreation.

V. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study which brought to the fore students' awareness of HIV/AIDS, their sources of information on the disease, knowledge of means of transmission and ways of preventing it has lots of implication for the library.

The revelation in this study that some students are still ignorant of the full meaning and ways of preventing HIV/AIDS implies that government needs to address further awareness. Since the respondents' major source of information is the mass media while playing down on the other sources especially reading granting that the respondents are undergraduates, university libraries should combine, the print with audio-visual resources to attract students' attention. Again, the recognition of various modes of awareness, education, welfare, legal and health services approaches as ways of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS imply that school, public and academic libraries should look inward and design services through which they can make these approaches realistic.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research which was highly welcomed by the students who felt that no positive effort had been made to create awareness on this topic of pandemic disease especially in FUTO brought about the following inevitable conclusion that there is still great need for HIV/AIDS awareness health/sex/peer education especially in the institutions of higher learning. This is so since:

- i. undergraduate students in the University have no deep knowledge of HIV/AIDS because majority of them know the full meaning of AIDS but not HIV;
- ii. the students' major source of information on HIV/AIDS is the mass media contrary to the expected reading and lecture sources;
- iii. though majority of the students know that HIV/AIDS is infectious, know the means of transmission and how to prevent it, a few of them are unexpectedly ignorant of them;
- iv. granted that more than half of the students affirmed that they would seek medical advice in an event of HIV/AIDS infection, others have conservative intention of keeping the information to themselves, pass it on or committing suicide;
- v. many students are not taking precautionary measures against HIV/AIDS in their life activities even though they are aware of the dangers;
- vi. the students were of the view that there should be general awareness, education, welfare, enhancement, legal and health approaches to reduce the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Guided by these findings, the author recommends that:
 - a. University libraries which are the major sources of information in the university should acquire adequate HIV/AIDS literature in various forms and use their ICT-based services to promote awareness and education on that. Circulation and Reference services could be used as outlets for the distribution of handbills and posters.

- b. Government should mandate all universities to develop and include health education programme in their curriculum, develop HIV/AIDS policy, enforce dress code and institute medical checks for every student which libraries can use its current awareness services to promote.
- c. University libraries should liaise with media professionals and health workers within and outside the university to provide counselling services.
- d. Above all, the result of this research can be used to convince the University management about the need for a university policy on HIV/AIDS.

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