

Full Length Research Paper

Challenges of HIV/AIDS to undergraduate students: The librarian's reaction

N. A. Ajayi* and B. O. Omotayo

Principal Librarian, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.

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Nigerian undergraduates are at high risk of AIDS. The study examined the challenges of HIV/AIDS to the undergraduate students of Babcock University in the 2006/2007 academic year. The objectives of the study were: To know the level of understanding of the students about HIV/AIDS; their attitudes towards AIDS victims; utilization of information and to highlight the pivotal roles of academic libraries in the dissemination of AIDS information and its prevention. The data for the study were collected through the use of questionnaire, which was administered to the students of Babcock University, Ilishan, Remo after pre-tested. Availability sample method was used because the questionnaires were given to them as they came in to use the libraries. Seven hundred respondents were given the questionnaire to complete and return between September and October, 2007. The results of the study revealed that HIV/AIDS was seen as the most urgent health problem among the students, the existence of AIDS changed the behavior of many and made them sought for more information. Information provided by the libraries was inadequate. It was recommended that academic libraries must take keen interest in acquiring special collections on HIV/AIDS. Introduction of e-learning through academic libraries will enable individual to learn at their own pace.

Key words: Undergraduate, HIV/AIDS, academic libraries.

INTRODUCTION

The HIV/AIDS pandemic remains one of the greatest health challenges facing the world today (Chanda et al., 2008). HIV infection has spread rapidly across the globe. The spread is increasing among heterosexual and bisexual men. In Africa, HIV is predominant among young people for they constitute larger percentage of the society.

The rapid growth of HIV positive cases in the last few years made Nigerians the third largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world in which majority are youths. McCain (2002) opined that two things are growing fast in Nigeria: Religion and HIV/AIDS. In the recent survey conducted by the Federal Government of Nigeria, 5.8% of the populations of Nigeria were tested positive for the HIV virus. In some states, the infection rate is as high as 13.5%.

Nigeria's socio-economic status, traditional social ills, unemployment, illiteracy, cultural myths on sex and large population living in the rural areas make its citizens

extremely vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS. Nigerian government launched National AIDS control program to create awareness to all. The Government also creates in the six geo-political zones of the country where people can go to test for HIV/AIDS and provide subsidized drugs for the affected victims.

Overview of related literature

Libraries have an important role in the provision of health information. According to Lankaster (2003), people generally see libraries as familiar, accessible and a reliable source of information and moreso going to the libraries do not carry any stigma. There is the need for the provision of health information services through libraries to the high-risk population especially young adults, who are increasingly making themselves vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, through alcohol, drug abuse and peer pressure.

Hence, Charles (2003) maintains that libraries have a moral vindication to provide access to information for children and young adults with special attention to AIDS

*Corresponding author. E-mail: nathajayi@yahoo.co.uk.

issues. Libraries especially academic libraries can play a pivotal role in educating undergraduates about the disease and ways of preventing its spread. Awareness campaign on campuses should bear in mind that the seriousness of the social stigma attached to the disease should be intensified. Libraries in their various locations must serve as powerful agents for creating awareness and disseminating relevant information among the students. Information resources on HIV/AIDS in the libraries are not many when one searches the literature. Ghosh (2006) reports that information resources in libraries are lacking in appropriateness and limited in number, not updated frequently. Aslib (2003) proceedings devoted a special issue on health informatics. Jones (2003) provides an overview of his research project on the efficacy on providing information via touch-screen information systems. Charles (2004) discusses about HIV/AIDS in Uganda and recommends library intervention to control the epidemic. O'Brien (2003) in her report elaborated the role of libraries in preventing AIDS epidemic. Baffour-Awuah (2004) explores the possibilities of using fiction collection as tools to fight HIV/AIDS battle. Press and Digs-Hobson (2003) opine that librarians can play a significant role in the provision of health information if they listen carefully to the needs of students, develop cultural competence and work with them. Ruffin (2005) recommended collaboration between health sciences libraries with community-based organizations to promote access to health information. Williams et al. (2003) found a huge variation in reasons for going to the internet assessing health information by varieties of people (youths, patients, professional or for general interest).

In Nigeria alone, young people constitute more than 45.5 million of the population, a figure which is more than half of the whole West African countries (World Youth Population, 2006) and Nigeria has the largest population in Africa which is almost twice that of the next populated country in the continent (Population and Economic Development, 2007). Young youths are at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Nigeria, just as they are in many other countries of the world (Fact sheet, 2008).

Studies conducted in Nigeria by Ching et al. (2005), Omoteso (2004), Oyetara and Bisiriyu (2007), show that Nigerian youth between age 15 – 24 years are the most affected age group and that female undergraduate students are highly vulnerable to the contraction of STIs/HIV because they do not use condom during sexual intercourse. He went further to say that there is significant gender difference with males reporting greater overall susceptibility for HIV than females

Furthermore, Faley and Uwakwe (2004), Aluede-Oyaziwo et al. (2005) opines that Nigerian undergraduate students have a highly favorable knowledge about HIV/AIDS, how it can be transmitted and what can be done to prevent spread of the virus. Study by Omoteso (2004) also show that HIV/AIDS awareness is increasing

phenomenally with the passing of each day. She opines that attitude of students towards student living with HIV/AIDS (SLWHA) continues to be that of discrimination, rejection and stigmatization.

Indeed one may rightly ask the question, are libraries doing enough? Because when one evaluates materials on HIV/AIDS in libraries, one discovers that most information on the shelves is out of date and therefore not useful. A study was conducted (African News Service, 2005) in Liberia about people's awareness of HIV/AIDS, it was discovered that people were afraid, especially women, to come out and tell that they have the virus because most of them were ignorant about the disease. These signal to our minds that more awareness needs to be created on AIDS.

Academic libraries are often talked of as the nerve center of academic community where knowledge and skills are acquired to solve information poverty and ignorance. Academic libraries are established to serve the university community including students. Libraries are accessible, open to the community and generally safe. They can be uniquely comfortable places for students to spend time to find out more about HIV/AIDS without the fear of stigmatization. Prevention should be the focus and prime concern that can bring about awareness. Since not all the students may want to come to the library. ICT-driven are the need of the hour and must act as an intermediary center with suitable awareness program for improving literacy, awareness and cultural awakening (Ghosh, 2005). Academic libraries should use new technology to develop online world in order to transform the lives of their youths.

Background information

Babcock University is a private University, located in Ogun State, Nigeria. The students can be said to be from good economic background, different nationality, because only such can pay the fees. The less privileged ones go to government owned Universities. The University was chosen for this study, as it is expected that the students, being from the high class homes will know the value of information, use the library to find information on HIV/AIDS and thus change their behaviour towards HIV/AIDS.

Statement of the problem

The challenges HIV/AIDS pose on students of higher institutions of learning have not been adequately addressed by academic libraries as information providers, campaigners of HIV/AIDS awareness and provision of up to date information on the disease. Hence, the need for the study.

Table 1. Social demographic characteristics of respondent.

Level (year of study)	No. of respondents	Sex	
		M	F
100	72	37	35
200	210	82	128
300	150	62	88
400	96	41	55
Total	516	222	294

Objective of the study

The objectives of the study are to:

- (i) Investigate the level of the respondents' knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS.
- (ii) Examine the respondents' attitudes toward AIDS victims.
- (iii) Find out students sources of information.
- (iv) Highlight the roles academic libraries should play in the dissemination of AIDS information and its prevention.

Research questions

1. Do undergraduate students perceive HIV/AIDS as health problem?
2. Does HIV/AIDS change students' sexual behaviour?
3. What is the students' attitude toward HIV/AIDS victims?
4. Do academic libraries have any major role to play in the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information?
5. Can academic libraries assist in the prevention of AIDS among undergraduates?

METHODOLOGY

The data for the study were collected through the use of questionnaires, which was administered to the students of Babcock University, Ilisan, Remo after it was pre-tested. The questionnaire consisted of four parts, part one contained bio-data, second part contained information on awareness of HIV/AIDS, part three contained changes in behaviours, while part four was on information utilization.

Availability sample method was used because the questionnaires were given to the students as they came in to use the libraries. Each faculty has a well-equipped library, link through internet to the main library. 100 - 500 level (year) students were used as respondents from the four existing faculties. The selection was made from all the facilities because HIV/AIDS is a disease of both poor and rich, male and female of all disciplines.

Seven hundred (700) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the students as they came in to make use of the faculty and the main libraries. The distribution of questionnaires lasted for four (4) weeks (September 16 – October 10, 2007) this was when the library patronage was at its peak when the semester examination was approaching.

From the 700 questionnaires distributed, six hundred and twenty-one (621) copies were returned out of which five hundred and sixteen (516) were found usable. This represented 88.11%. Data

collected were analyzed and the findings reported.

RESULTS

Profile of respondents

The ages of respondents ranged between 17 - 25 years which is the most sexually active age group of the country's population (Table 1).

Perceived most urgent health problem among students

The respondents were asked to indicate the perceived most urgent health problem among the students. Fifty percent (50.0%) saw HIV/AIDS as the most life threatening problem. Heart disease (17.8%) and alcoholism (17.4%) were seen by few as most life threatening problem. While other disease were not really seen as life threatening problems (Table 2).

The result shows that all the respondents (100%) were aware of HIV/AIDS and its associated problems, this agrees with the findings of Chanda et al. (2008). They were further asked if they know their HIV/AIDS status, astonishingly, almost seventy one percent (70.9%) know their status and just twenty-seven percent (26.7%) did not know their status. This high percentage can be attributed to the awareness campaigns going on in the media.

Degree of concern about AIDS

Perceiving AIDS as most urgent health problem, having the awareness of the disease and knowing one's status or not calls for a concern. Hence the respondents were asked about their degree of concern of AIDS. An appreciable number (45.0%) of them were very concerned about AIDS, 31.0% were a little concerned while a few did not showed any concern (Figure 1).

Change in behaviour

Concerned for HIV/AIDS is intended to bring a change in

Table 2. Perceived most urgent health problem.

Problem	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative %
HIV/AIDS	258	50.0	50.0
Heart disease	91	17.6	67.6
Alcoholism	90	17.4	85.0
Drug abuse	40	7.8	92.8
Cancer	25	4.9	97.6
Mental illness	12	2.3	99.9
Others	-	-	-
Do not know	-	-	-

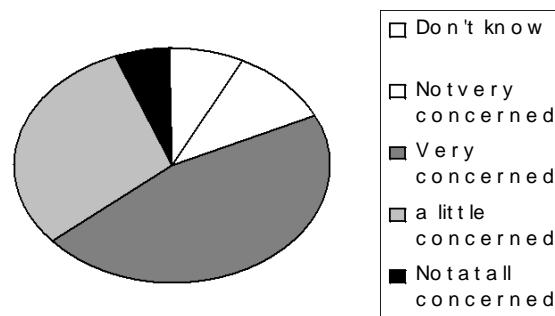


Figure 1. Degree of concern about AIDS.

Table 3. Change in behaviour.

No.	Statement	Responses	Percentage
1	Because of the risk of AIDS I seek information regularly	276	53.5
2	Because of the risk of AIDS I have changed my behaviour	150	29.1
3	Despite the risk of AIDS I have not changed my behaviour	30	5.8
4	Because of the risk of AIDS I am seriously thinking of changing my behaviour	6	1.2
5	Undecided	72	13.9

attitude and behaviour of students in order to necessitate preventive effort, reduce complications and prolong life. The respondents were asked how their knowledge of HIV/AIDS applied to their behaviour. Fifty-four percent (53.5%) sought information of HIV/AIDS regularly in order to become knowledgeable about it. Twenty-nine percent (29.1%) said that the risk of contacting AIDS has changed their behaviours. However, some (5.8%) despite the risk of contacting AIDS, have not changed their behaviour, while 13.9 percent cannot decide whether it has changed their behaviour or not (Table 3).

Perceived ways of contacting AIDS

There are taboos and superstitious beliefs among people,

in developing countries, students inclusive, on how the disease is contacted. Respondents were asked their perceived ways on the mode of contacting AIDS. The most common ways cited by them was intimate sexual contact or unprotected sexual intercourse (33.5%), receiving blood transfusion (33.1%) and sharing needles (13.1%). The last been friendly kissing on the cheek (0.4) (Table 4).

Attitude to people living with HIV/AIDS

The students were asked what were their attitudes towards people living with AIDS victims. Interestingly, majority (53.1%) were of the opinion that AIDS sufferers should be treated with compassion, while a few felt that

Table 4. Mode of contacting AIDS.

Mode	Responses	Percentage
Receiving blood transfusion	504	33.1
Intimate sexual contact	510	33.5
Sharing needles	474	13.1
Working in close proximity to AIDS victim	12	0.8
Insect bites	12	0.8
Being coughed or sneeze on	6	0.4
Friendly kissing on the cheek	6	0.4

Table 5. Attitude to AIDS victims.

Attitude	Responses	Percentage
AIDS sufferers should be treated with compassion	432	53.1
Every one should have a blood tested to see if they have AIDS	318	39.6
It is the people personal fault if they get AIDS	24	3.0
I would refuse to work alongside someone who has AIDS	18	2.2
I would not sit with someone who has AIDS	12	1.5

Table 6. Relevance of source of information.

Source	Essential	Useful	Not useful	No opinion
From radio/television	150	108	1	-
From the doctor	143	111	5	3
On the internet	120	127	6	-
Printed materials in the library	40	61	100	3
Colleagues	21	24	10	-
Not necessary	-	-	-	-

the carriers are at fault and therefore that they will not sit near someone who has AIDS (Table 5). This is a misconception that has to be corrected through information

Utilization of information

The respondents were asked to rate the importance of information received from different source. Information got from radio and television, doctors and the internet were rated higher than any other sources. Printed materials in the library were not essentially found useful (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

HIV/AIDS were perceived by the students as most threatening health problem in Nigeria. This corroborated the finding of McCain (2002) that two things are growing fast in Nigeria: Religion and HIV/AIDS. No wonder both

Federal and State Governments are allocating funds on regular basis to fight menace of HIV/AIDS in the society. Private sectors, religious bodies and non-government agencies are also involved in the campaign.

Due to enlightenment campaign mounted by difference agencies, all the respondents were aware of HIV/AIDS. However, because of stigmatization not many students wanted to subject themselves for HIV/AIDS test. This agreed with earlier study conducted in Liberia (African News Services, 2005).

Majority of the respondents felt that HIV/AIDS is a major health problem. This put high responsibility on the library as an information provider to acquire appropriate printed and electronic materials on HIV/AIDS. According to Kalichman and Rompa (2003), lack of current information about HIV may affect health-information-seeking behavior.

The knowledge of what AIDS is and how it is infected would create a better understanding and reduce stigmatization on the people living with AIDS (PLWA). Library must by default engage in a form of social marketing, the practice that aims to change social attitude

towards AIDS in a positive way.

The existence and risk of contacting AIDS had brought about changes in students' habit and behavior, consequently made them to seek for more information. Although earlier study (Chanda et al., 2008) reported inconsistency in behavior change patterns among young people.

Respondents though were seeking info on HIV/AIDS, they did not find the library resources very useful, because the university library did not stock adequate materials on it. Muswazi (2003) had also found that materials in the library on HIV/AIDS were lacking in appropriateness and limited in number, not updated frequently. This is not too good because according to Lankaster (2003) people see libraries as familiar, accessible and reliable source of information and going to libraries do not carry any stigma. Other studies (Gielen et al., 2001; Black, 2002) opined that access to current information from libraries remove stigma that are associated with HIV/AIDS. Academic libraries seem not to be doing enough in providing up-to-date information and making them available to students. Kalichman and Rompa (2003) believed that lack of current information about HIV may affect health seeking behaviour.

Respondents rely more on radio television, doctors and the internet for information on HIV/AIDS, as these sources are common sources of information to the students.

CONCLUSION

That 100% of the respondents were aware of HIV/AIDS and its associated problems, and 70% know their HIV/AIDS status which could imply that those who were not aware and did not know their status lacked adequate and current information. The study revealed that undergraduate students perceived AIDS as most urgent health problem facing them. The realization of the existence has significantly changed the behaviour of most students. Thus attitudes to people living with AIDS were positive as indicated by many of the respondents. The survey also showed that academic libraries have not been doing enough. They have pivotal roles to play in the provision of health information. There is a dire need to provide health information services through academic libraries to the high risk population especially young adults, who are highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Interestingly, enhancing access to health care information through convergences technologies has gained much importance as it has been reflected in this result.

Recommendation

The problem of HIV/AIDS exists, it cannot be overlooked, and therefore all hands must be on deck to stem its spread. Health information programs should be directed

at the students with a view to maintaining awareness, avoiding panic reactions and repairing for targeted health education activities. The objective should be to correct misinformation, prejudice and fear by raising the level of knowledge about the modes of transmission, the spread of the infection and the risk associated with behaviour patterns. Information is power and it removes ignorance.

Academic libraries should take keen interest in the acquisition of special collections that will help to get the message across to their clientele to keep them informed of new development in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. They should also embark on convergence technologies to spread HIV-AIDS information. Information and communication technology (ICT) in convergences with other forms of communication have the potential to reach those hitherto not reached by any other media. It reduces the skew in knowledge distribution between rich and poor, rural and urban women and men.

Introduction of e-learning through academic libraries is a cost effective way of spreading information across to many people. It enables people to learn at their own pace, they can be logged anonymously, which facilitate a non-threatening and non-discriminatory environment.

Organizing seminars, exhibitions and other related forum such as World AIDS Day Celebration, distribution of publications on HIV-AIDS freely among the students and weekly lectures. Conducting get together among peer groups to discuss various issues related to HIV-AIDS.

The problem of HIV-AIDS pandemic is too complex and too multifaceted for one stakeholder constituency to deal with, hence there should be creation of partnership or alliances as a strategy for creating "health enabling community context".

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