

Title: Knowledge of HIV/AIDS and sexual behaviour in Nigeria: Does knowledge of HIV/AIDS have implications for risky sexual behaviour among sexually active youths?

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Background/statement of problem:

HIV/AIDS pandemic remains a major public health problem in the sub-Saharan African countries where about 22.5 million people are living with the virus. Despite this overall level, sub-Saharan African countries exhibit substantial variations in the burden of HIV/AIDS with higher prevalence found in the Southern Africa countries than any other regions in the continent. In Nigeria, recent estimates by the National Agency for the Control of AIDS show that about 3 million people are living with HIV (these accounts for almost 9% of the global HIV infection) (NACA, 2010). More importantly, adolescents and young people are becoming part of the most vulnerable populations as a result of their exposure to risky sexual behaviour and lack of protective measures (UNGASS, 2010) and to a large extent, a greater number of adolescents and young people are often neglected from discussions on sexual issues. Although, evidence of high level of knowledge about modes of contracting and preventing HIV/AIDS among youths has been documented but only few studies have been able to establish the links between knowledge of HIV/AIDS and implications for high risk sexual behaviour in Nigeria. Therefore, the study aimed at examining the interactions between level of knowledge of HIV/AIDS and risky sexual behaviour among unmarried sexually active youths in Nigeria. Attempts will also be made to documents prevalence of risky behaviour among youths.

Method:

The study utilized data from the Nigerian 2007 National HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health Survey (NARHS) on 531 (61.0%) and 339 (39.0%) unmarried sexually active male and female youths age 15-24 years respectively. Knowledge of HIV/AIDS was assessed from information on modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS as reported by the respondents. The outcome variable for the study was risky sexual behaviour measured by non-use of condom during last sexual intercourse, having multiple sexual partners and exchange of sex for gifts. A set of co-variates such as sex, age, educational level, place of residence and religion were included in the analysis. The analysis was further disaggregated into male and female sex categories, and univariate analysis was employed to explore variations in the level of HIV/AIDS awareness and risky sexual behaviour. Interactions between knowledge of HIV/AIDS and high risk sexual behaviour, controlling for selected socio-demographic variables were tested through binary logistic regression analysis.

Results:

The mean age at first sex for male and female was 16.0 years and 17.0 years respectively. There was high level of knowledge of HIV/AIDS among youths (92.5% for males and 85.0% for females). About 99.6% of males and 98.0% of females did not use condom during last sexual intercourse. Also, out of 531 sexually active male youths, almost 42.6% had more than one sexual partner compared to about 15.0% of 339 female counterparts. The prevalence of transactional sex was lower among youths. Only 12.0% of males and 15.0% of females engaged in transactional sex. In the multivariate analysis, surprisingly, youths with high knowledge of HIV/AIDS were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour through non-use of condoms (OR=2.21, CI=0.65-0.87) and exchange of sex for gifts (OR=1.02) but less likely to having multiple sexual partners (OR=0.92), relative to those with little knowledge.

The association was statistically significant only for non-use of condoms. In respect to gender, relative to males, female youths were four times (OR=4.1) more likely not to use condom during last sex and the association was statistically significant. Similarly, the odds of having multiple sexual partners decreased among female youths. Out of 5 co-variables included in the analysis, only sex, age and religious affiliations were significantly related to risky sexual behaviour.

Conclusions and recommendations:

Arising from the findings, the study concludes that, despite the widespread knowledge of HIV/AIDS among youths, high risk sexual behaviour is still prevalent, most especially among female youths. This study highlights the need for concerted efforts towards providing access to female contraceptive method for HIV prevention. Also, beyond interventions for improving level of HIV/AIDS knowledge, programs and advocacies should focus more on promoting safe sex practices among young populations in Nigeria.