



RE-EMERGENCE OF HIV/AIDS: INSIGHTS INTO THE PREVENTIVE PRACTICES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN EGOR LGA, EDO STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

HIV/AIDS are among the most common infections in the world and therefore constitute a major public health problem as they cause devastating long term consequences if untreated especially in adolescents. Post HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programmes and safe sex behaviour has waned especially among adolescents. The purpose of this study was to assess awareness and practice of preventive measures for HIV/AIDS among secondary school students in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State. The study was a descriptive survey carried out among secondary school students in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State. A total of 258 respondents participated in the study. They were selected using the multi-stage sampling technique. Data was collected personally by the researcher while analysis was done using frequency counts and percentages. Out of 258 respondents, 91.5% were aware of HIV/AIDS, while the others were not aware. The most common mode of transmission was unprotected sex (68.0%). However some others still thought that mosquito bite and eating food prepared by an infected person are modes of transmission. Abstinence (44.9%), monogamous relationship (44.9%), use of condom (43.4%) and regular check-up (41.8%) were mostly considered to be measures for HIV/AIDS prevention. The study revealed that only 79(30.6%) out of the 258 respondents were sexually active. Among this group, 73.4% had more than one sexual partner, while 32.9% and 64.3% had never used condom or done HIV/AIDS screening respectively. Secondary school students in Egor Local Government are aware of HIV/AIDS, however misconceptions about the mode of transmission and low compliance of preventive measures among sexually active adolescents calls for concern. Efforts should therefore be intensified towards improving Knowledge of mode of transmission and safe practices for HIV/AIDS prevention among adolescents through sexual health education, media campaigns and seminars.

Key words: Awareness; Preventive Measures; Practice; HIV/AIDS; Adolescents.

Introduction

Globally, the number of sexually active adolescents have continued to increase with their activities characterized by risky sexual activities that predispose them to Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (Enwereji & Onyeechi, 2021). AIDS is an infectious disease caused by the HIV which is currently having significant effect on global economies and public health. It is a viral infection that mainly attacks and destroys certain white blood cells that are essential to the body's immune system. In spite of efforts put in by government and other agencies to provide factual information on HIV/AIDS to young people, it's prevalence among this group remain a public health and global challenge posing serious threat to human life/dignity which influence social and economic development of any nation (Badru et al., 2020; Pharr et al., 2017; Adeomi et al., 2014).

The rate of HIV mortality has also tripled in the last two decades with sub-Saharan Africa recording the highest number of deaths (UNICEF, 2015; UNAIDS; 2014, Michielson et al., 2013). In Nigeria, HIV prevalence among adolescents have been reported to be the highest in West and central Africa. An estimated 3.5% of adolescents 10-19 years in Nigeria are living with HIV (Pharr. et al., 2017). The increasing vulnerability of adolescents can be attributed to their early initiation of sexual activities as expressed in several studies carried out in Nigeria (Sumolu, Dipeolu & Babalola, 2002; Okonofua, 2000; Okpani & Okpani, 2000).

Other risky sexual behaviours such as multiple sexual partners, unprotected sexual intercourse, having a high risk partner and engaging in sex work, inability to negotiate safe sex as a result inexperience and other risk factors continue to threaten the health and wellbeing of young people (Abate et al., 2020; Chen, 2008). Preventive programmes for HIV especially among adolescents have emphasized behavior change using the ABC approach- Abstinence, Being faithful to one partner (Monogamous relationship) and Condom use (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), 2020). Whereas this approach has been highly recommended and seen to be effective in stemming the wave of HIV especially among adolescents as expressed in its success in Uganda (Singh et al., 2003), adoption of this strategy among adolescents in Nigeria remain low (CDCP, 2020; Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) Nigeria, 2007). Current trends in Nigeria seem to encourage the spread

and preventive efforts of HIV/AIDS. The economic downturn which has forced many young people to fend for themselves as parents are increasingly becoming incapacitated to handle the financial needs of their wards. The “Yahoo Syndrome” currently trendy among youths which also support all forms of sexually perversions including sex parties where partners who are at the receiving end are usually not able to negotiate safer sex.

The National Policy on health and development of adolescents and young people in Nigeria supports abstinence only programmes as a strategic intervention for HIV prevention among young people (FMoH Nigeria, 2007). With the absence of currently certified cure, prevention remains the best way of curbing this menace through a more holistic and comprehensive approach which include, encouraging abstinence, promoting condom use and providing an enabling environment that supports regular HIV screening especially among adolescents.

Comprehensive knowledge of HIV pathway including increased awareness of preventive measures have the potential to reduce the spread of HIV. It is therefore necessary to investigate what young people know about HIV including their preventive practices with a view to providing information that will help reduce the spread of the virus. With this intention, the present study was conducted to explore the awareness and practice of preventive measures for HIV/AIDS among secondary school students in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- To ascertain the awareness of mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS among secondary school students in Egor LGA, Edo State.
- To understand the extent to which secondary school students in Egor LGA, Edo State are aware of HIV/AIDS preventive measures.
- To determine the prevalent preventive measures for HIV/AIDS among secondary school students in Egor LGA, Edo State.

Research Questions

1. Are secondary school students in Egor LGA aware of the mode of transmission of HIV?
2. Do secondary school students in Egor LGA know the preventive measures for HIV/AIDS?
3. What are the preventive practices for HIV/AIDS adopted by secondary school students in Egor LGA?

Materials and Methods

This study is a descriptive survey conducted among Senior Secondary School students in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State. Egor is a local government area in Edo State with its headquarters located in Uselu town. It has an area of 93km² and a population of 339,889 as at 2006 census.

The people are predominantly Binis but other ethnic groups such as Igbos, Hausas, Yorubas, Urhobos collectively form a sizeable proportion of the population. The majority of the people are predominantly traders, artisans, farmers and civil servants.

The study population was SS1 and SS2 students attending public Senior Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area. The total enrolment for SS1 and SS2 students in 2022/2023 session was 4,889. The multistage sampling technique was used to select 258 respondents for the study. The schools were first grouped into single sex (2 schools) and co-educational (10 schools) using cluster sampling. Thereafter purposive and systematic sampling technique was used to pick two single sex schools and four co-educational schools respectively. Finally, proportionate sampling was used to select 10% of the population of students in each of the schools to give a total of 258 respondents for the study.

A questionnaire pre-tested to check for reliability and self-administered was used for data collection. The questionnaire elicited information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents as well as their awareness and practice of preventive measure for HIV/AIDS. A total of two hundred and fifty-eight (258) questionnaires were administered and retrieved. Informed consent was gotten from the school authorities and from the respondents. Data was analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

Results

Table1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
10-15	144	55.8
16-19	114	44.2
	258	100
Sex		
Male	129	50.0
Female	129	50.0
	258	100
Class		
SS 1	135	52.3
SS 2	123	47.7
	258	100

The respondents were mainly between ages 10 and 19 years. Of these, 144(55.8%), were between 10 and 15years while 114(44.2%) were between 16 and 19 years. The mean age was 15.3years. A total of 135(52.3%) were in SS1 while 123(47.7%) in SS2 classes. The study had equal representation of male and female students, 129(50%) for each sex.

Table 2: Awareness of HIV/AIDS and Mode of Transmission

Awareness of HIV/AIDS	Frequency (n) = 258	Percentage (%)
Aware	236	91.5
Not Aware	22	8.5
	258	100
Mode of Transmission		
Unprotected sex	170	68.0
Sharing of sharp objects	78	31.2
Blood transfusion	62	24.8
Mosquito bite	57	22.8
Eating food prepared by infected person	56	22.4
Breastfeeding	46	18.4
Mother to unborn child	34	13.6
Sharing toilet	21	8.4
Shaking hands	09	3.6

Table 2 shows that 91.5% of the respondents are aware of HIV/AIDS. The most frequently mentioned mode of HIV transmission by respondents was unsafe sex (68.0%). Some respondents however considered mosquito bite (22.8%), eating food prepared by an infected person (22.4%), sharing toilet (8.4%) and shaking hands (3.6%) as means of HIV transmission.

Table 3: Awareness of Preventive Measures for HIV/AIDS

S/N	ITEMS	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	Abstinence	46 (36.9%)	69 (53.9%)	115(44.9%)
2	Monogamous Relationship	53 (41.4%)	62 (48.4%)	115(44.9%)
3	Condom	64 (50.0%)	47 (36.7%)	111(43.4%)
4	Regular Check-up	55 (43.0%)	52 (40.6%)	107(41.8%)
5	Vaccination	08 (6.3%)	05 (3.9%)	13(5.1%)
6	Douching	04 (3.1%)	09 (7.0%)	13(5.1%)
7	Use of Antibiotics	08 (6.3%)	08 (6.3%)	16(6.3%)
8	Oral contraceptive	02 (1.6%)	01 (0.7%)	03(1.2%)
9	Use of Local Herbs	05 (3.9%)	08 (6.3%)	13(5.1%)

Table 3, shows that the awareness of HIV/AIDS preventive measures among respondents. The most frequently mentioned measures for preventing HIV/AIDS among respondents were abstinence (44.9%), monogamous relationship (44.9%), use of condom (44.4%) and regular check-up (41.8%). Further analysis showed that females (53.9%) were more aware of abstinence as a preventive measure for STIs than males (35.9%). Furthermore, about half of the male respondents (50.0%) knew condom as a preventive measure as against 36.7% of the female respondents. Other measures sparingly measured were vaccination (5.1%), douching (5.1%), use of antibiotics (6.3%), oral contraceptive (1.2%) and local herbs (5.1%). Scores 50% and above for items one to four indicates high level of awareness of that preventive measure. However, items five to nine are not preventive measures for HIV/AIDs but were added to also know if the respondents would identify the as preventive measures. The responses indicate that these were sparingly mentioned.

Table 4: Practice of Preventive Measures for HIV/AIDS

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondent’s practice of preventive measures for HIV/AIDS. Abstinence was practiced among 64.3% male and 74.4% female respondents. Among sexually active respondents, only 26.6% had just one sexual partner, the remaining 73.4% had more than one sexual partner. Furthermore, 31.6% Of the sexually active respondents use condom regularly, 35.5% sometimes and 32.9% do not use at all. The study also reveals that 68.4% of the sexually active respondents have never been screened for HIV. Among those who have ever been screened, 44.0% and 28.0 were screened within the last six and twelve months respectively while the remaining 28.0% were screened over a year ago.

Discussion

Information and knowledge about a particular subject matter usually form the basis for the evaluation of practice. Adequate knowledge about HIV/AIDS is a powerful means of promoting positive attitudes and engaging in safe practices. This study examined the awareness and practice of preventive measure for HIV/AIDS among secondary school students in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State Nigeria. The respondents were between the ages of 10 and 19years with a mean age of 15years and equal sex distribution.

The study revealed that almost all the respondents (91.5%) were aware of HIV/AIDS. This corresponds with other studies carried out by several researchers in Nigeria (Badru et al., 2020, Amu & Adegun, 2015; Nwabueze et.al, 2014; Adeomi et al., 2014; Temin et.al, 1999), which also indicate high level of awareness for STIs especially HIV/AIDS among adolescents. The high level of awareness about HIV/AIDS as seen in the study and several others is expected as government of many nations

including Nigeria have explored several means of providing information to the public about the scourge since its inception in 1981.

The mode of HIV transmission mentioned by majority of the respondents was unprotected sex (68%), other measures were sparingly mentioned. This is in consonance with the findings in similar studies where majority of the respondents also agreed that unprotected sexual intercourse was the most common mode of HIV transmission (Olorukooba et al., 2023; Adeoye et al., 2014; Thanavanh et al., 2013). However, there were some misconceptions as some respondents mentioned mosquito bite (22.8%), eating food prepared by infected person (22.4%), sharing toilets (8.4%) and hand shaking (3.6%) as modes of HIV transmission. These misconceptions were also identified by Nubed & Akoachere (2016) in a similar study done in Ghana. These misconceptions coupled with the low percentage of other modes of transmission is an indication that there is need to strengthen sexuality education programmes in schools,

Abstinence, monogamous relationship, use of condom and regular check-up ranked tops among the preventive measures for HIV/AIDS known by the respondents, though the figures fell slightly below 50% for all the measures mentioned. The National Policy on the Health and Development of Adolescents in Nigeria promotes abstinence only programme as a key intervention for HIV prevention among adolescents (FMoH Nigeria, 2007). However, with the report from this study indicating only about 45% of the respondents being aware of abstinence as a preventive measure for HIV, there is urgent need to critically evaluate the effectiveness of this programme. The respondents in a study done in Western Nigeria among in-school adolescents, suggests continuous programme to promote abstinence as a means of ensuring effectiveness of the programme (Oladebo & fayemi, 2011). In their view, the use of interactive multimedia, educative talk shows, active parent-adolescent communication and adolescent friendly counsellors could help accentuate the need to adopt abstinence among adolescents. The mention of some other measures such as oral contraceptives, douching, use of antibiotics and local herbs as means of prevention by a small proportion of the respondents should not be taken for granted. These misconceptions could form the basis for initiating risky sexual behaviours such as unprotected sexual intercourse. These findings also suggest that respondents are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the preventive measures for HIV/AIDS as indicated in some studies (Adeoye et al., 2014; Oladebo & fayemi, 2011) this has serious implication for HIV control and prevention.

This study also investigated the preventive practices for HIV/AIDS among respondents. Findings indicate that only 30.6% of the respondents were sexually active with the percentage slightly higher for males (35.7%) than females (25.6%). This aligns with similar studies in Nigeria which equally reported low percentage of sexually active adolescents (Adeoye et al., 2014). Among sexually active respondents, some high risk behaviours which are very critical in HIV transmission and control were observed. Majority of the sexually active respondents had more than one sexual partner (73.4%) with only very small proportion adhering to consistent use of condom (31.6%). Inconsistent condom use was also reported among adolescents in some other studies (Adeoye et al., 2014; Oladebo & fayemi, 2011; Olugbenga-Bello et al., 2010). Some factors that inhibit the consistent use of condom as noted in these studies are adolescents feeling embarrassed to purchase condom from shops, issues of confidentiality of shop keepers, reduced sexual pleasure while using condom and affordability. Consistent condom use was seen to be higher for males than females, this finding indicates male dominance in decision making as also expressed in other spheres of society. Screening for the infection was quite low as only 31.6% has ever screened and among these respondents, only 44.0% have been screened in the last six months. This corroborates the findings of other studies (Adeoye et al., 2014; National population Commission, 2014), which also reported low uptake of HCT (HIV Counselling and Testing). It therefore underscores the need for more advocacy and promotion of HCT especially among adolescents.

Conclusion

This study has shown that secondary school adolescents in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State are aware of HIV/AIDS. However, in-depth knowledge of this infection and effective utilization of preventive practices still remains low. Majority of the sexually active respondents are still involved in risky sexual practices such as having multiple sexual practice that put them at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. This study is very significant as it has serious implication for the re-emergence of HIV/AIDS. It is therefore recommended that is urgent need to strengthen and improve sexual health education among adolescents. Comprehensive HIV/AIDS programmes should also be intensified in the schools since teachers have been identified as major sources of information on STIs for adolescents. Public enlightenment campaigns on HIV/AIDs through media, seminars, billboards etc, should be intensified and sustained.

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