

Analysis of Spatial Awareness of HIV-AIDS amongst Students of Tertiary Institutions in Edo State, Nigeria

Ojeifo O. Magnus and Julius O. Gbakeji

*Department of Geography and Regional Planning, Ambrose Alli University,
P.M.B. 14, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria
E-mail: ojbliss07@yahoo.com*

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ABSTRACT This study examines the spatial awareness of HIV-AIDS among students of tertiary institutions in Edo State Nigeria. Four higher institutions were selected for this study in the state and primary data were obtained from these institutions using questionnaire and personal observation. Secondary data used were obtained from published materials. The analysis of the data showed that awareness of HIV-AIDS in the high institutions is relatively high and most of the students were aware of its existence. In spite of this, students were still found to be involved in acts capable of spreading the disease. Several measures were however recommended as a way of reducing the spread of the disease and treatment of infected persons.

INTRODUCTION

As HIV-AIDS pandemic continues to spread around the world at an alarming rates, the number of people with the disease is been expected to grow significantly by the end of this decade (ICI 2002). As at the end of 1999 an estimated 34.3 million people were living with HIV-AIDS. In that same year 5.6 million became infected while 2.6 million people died of the disease (UNAIDS 2000). Latest statistics published by UNAIDS in December 2006 shows that an estimated 39.5 million people were living with HIV/AIDS, which is an astronomical increase compared to the 1999 figures. In this same year, 4.3 million people were infected with HIV while 2.9 million died of the disease. The statistics also show that more than 25 million people have died of AIDS since 1981.

Among the regions of the world, sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected. According to UNAIDS 2006, an estimated 24.7 million people are living with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, while 2.1 million people have died. In Nigeria, the first evidence of HIV-AIDS pandemic was reported in 1986 (AVERT 2007). By 1999, an estimated 5.1% -5.4% of the population was infected with the HIV (Panchaud et al. 2002). The Current statistics shows that HIV prevalence rate in Nigeria a country of a population of about 140 million is 5.6% and the number of people living with HIV/AIDS is 6.1 million (FMOH 2006). It is projected that Nigeria will have 10-15 million cases of HIV/AIDS by the year 2010 (ICA 2002).

Over the last 6 years, campaign on HIV-AIDS at all levels of government has intensified in

Nigeria. This campaign has been geared towards creating awareness of the dangers of the diseases, modes of infection and prevention. The role of non-governmental organizations in prosecuting this campaign is also very commendable. It is however sad to note that even with the high level of campaign the rate of infection is still very high. A number of factors including lack of access to information especially in the rural areas, traditional beliefs and practices, and social attitudes have been attributed to this.

The rate of infection has been seen to vary with people of different socio-economic characteristics. These characteristics include age, sex and social class or grouping. On the basis of social grouping, it has been argued that the prevalence is high among social groups such as students, artisans, prostitutes, and drug addicts among others. The concern of this research is on students of tertiary institutions. There is a conception that prevalence rate is high among students of tertiary institutions. This argument is borne from the belief that there is high rate of premarital sexual activity, drug addiction and cultism as channel of HIV/AIDS infection are common phenomena in Nigeria campuses.

With the level of prevalence, it is been asked if the students know about the disease or the various campaigns about it. This study is therefore set to determine the level of awareness of HIV-AIDS in Nigerian campuses with particular reference to four tertiary institutions in Edo State of Nigeria. The study is to create more awareness

Table 1: Percentage distribution of the age structure of respondents

<i>School</i>	<i>Under 20</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>20-30 years</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>30 years-above</i>	<i>%</i>
University of Benin	30	30	50	50	20	20
Ambrose Alli University	24	24	56	56	20	20
Federal Polytechnic Auchi	20	20	66	66	14	14
College of Education	20	20	62	62	18	18
Total	94		234		72	

Source: Field Survey, 2006

about the disease not only to students but the general public. Policy makers are also to be afforded through this study the opportunity to know the level of HIV-AIDS awareness and rate of infection in the microscopic society like the campuses.

To be able to achieve the aim of this study two objectives were studied. First the study examined the level of HIV-AIDS awareness in the various campuses and secondly it determined the preventive measures used by students in curbing the spread of the disease.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

This study was carried out in four selected higher institution of learning in Edo State Nigeria. The Institutions are; the University of Benin, Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Auchi Polytechnic Auchi and the College of Education Ekiadolor. Data used in the study were derived from two principal source viz. primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprised questionnaire and interview schedule. For the questionnaire 400 were made and 100 were distributed in each of the four institutions. The distribution was done in five faculties/schools of each institution. 20 questionnaire were randomly distributed and administered among 10 female and 10 male students of each faculties/schools who are 18 years and above and are sexually active. Questions relating to awareness of HIV-AIDS, sex habits and infection were asked. Interview schedule was directed at the management of the institutions and questions relating to the various sensitization programmes on HIV on campus were asked. Secondary source was mainly documentary sources comprising published textbook and articles in relevant journals. Data collected from the various sources were analyzed descriptively and statistically using simple frequency tables, percentages, and charts.

AN ASSESSMENT OF HIV-AIDS AWARENESS IN THE STUDY INSTITUTIONS

In assessing the level of awareness of HIV-AIDS in the high institutions under study, the age structure of the students (questionnaire respondents) was first determined. For the purpose of analysis, three age categories were created, these are under 20 years category, between 20-30 years category and 30 years and above category. Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of the age structure of respondents in the various schools.

In the distribution, 30% of the respondents in the University of Benin are less than 20 years. 50% are between 20-30 years while 20% are above 30 years. In Ambrose Alli University, 24% accounts for under 20 while 56% accounts for between 20-30 years, 20% accounts for the age 30 years and above. In Federal Polytechnic Auchi, ages less than 20 years accounted for 20% while 66% was for students between 20-30 years, 30 years and above accounted for 14%. In the college of education under 20 years accounted for 20% while ages between 20-30 years accounted for 62%, 30 years and above accounted for 18%.

The percentage distribution of the age structure of all respondents shows that those under 20 years accounted for 23.5%, while between 20-30 years age category accounted for 58.5%. The ones above 30 years accounted for 18%. By implication ages between 20-30 years are more in the sampled population and this is the sexually active and more vulnerable population. According to AVERT (2007) HIV/AIDS prevalence in Nigeria at the current 5.6%, is highest among young people between the ages of 20-24 compared with other age groups. The Nigeria's STD/HIV Control estimates that over 60% of new HIV infections are in the 15 and 25 year old age group (USAID 2003).

To ascertain the level of awareness, respondents were asked questions on the causes of HIV-AIDS, modes of transmission and prevention. In the analysis, the responses were scored low, medium and high. The score is low if the respondent has an idea about the disease but knows nothing about its cause, mode of transmission and prevention. The score is medium if the respondent know about the disease and has little of its transmission and prevention. It is high if the respondent know much about the disease, its transmission and prevention. Table 2 shows the level of awareness in each faculty/school of the institution.

Table 2: Level of HIV-AIDS awareness in the faculty/school of the institutions

Faculty / School	Awareness Level			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
<i>University of Benin</i>				
Arts	4	9	7	20
Engineering	2	7	11	20
Social Science	3	10	7	20
Agriculture	1	6	13	20
Law	Nil	5	15	20
Total	10	37	53	100
Percentage	10%	37%	53%	
<i>Ambrose Alli University</i>				
Arts	1	5	14	20
Social Science	Nil	8	12	20
Engineering	2	11	7	20
Agriculture	Nil	6	14	20
Law	1	8	11	20
Total	4	38	58	100
Percentage	4%	38%	58%	
<i>Federal Polytechnic Auchi</i>				
Engineering	3	11	6	20
Business Studies	1	7	12	20
Environmental Management	Nil	16	4	20
Applied Arts	1	9	10	20
Technical Education	2	14	4	20
Total	7	57	36	100
Percentage	7%	57%	36%	
<i>College of Education</i>				
Dept. of Geography Education	Nil	13	7	20
Dept. of Social Studies	1	11	8	20
Agric Education	2	13	5	20
Dept. of Biology Education	Nil	9	11	20
Maths / primary Education	2	13	5	20
Total	5	59	36	100
Percentage	5%	59%	36%	
Grand Total	26	191	183	400
Grand Percentage	6.5%	47.7%	45.8%	

Source: Field Survey, 2006

In the university of Benin, the level of awareness is relatively high, accounting 53% of respondents. Those with medium and low level of awareness accounted for 37% and 10% respectively. In Ambrose Alli University, awareness level is also relatively high with 58% of the respondents. The medium and low levels accounts for 38% and 4% respectively. At Federal Polytechnic, 36% of respondents accounted for high awareness while 57% and 7% were respectively for medium and low awareness levels. In the College of Education, respondents with high level of awareness accounted for 36% while medium and low levels accounted for 59% and 5% respectively. The high percentage scores for medium awareness for the Federal Polytechnic and College of Education is an indication that majority of the students are though aware of the disease but do not understand issues on the causes, transmission and prevention.

The total awareness scores were computed so as to know the level of awareness among students of the four institutions. In the computation, 6.5% of the students scored low, 47.7% scored medium while 45.8% scored high. The high percentage of medium score over high score indicates that the level of HIV-AIDS awareness in the higher institutions in Nigeria is not very high. Several factors are responsible for this, prominent among them is inadequate information. On this basis, the sources of information on HIV-AIDS among students were ascertained. It was revealing that while 55% of the respondents got their information mostly from the media (television, radio and newspapers), 28% got theirs mostly from public lectures, seminars and bills. 17% on the other hand got their information from other sources especially friends and neighbours. These sources could be unreliable and the information misleading. On the basis of those who are aware of the existence of the disease, the medium awareness percentage of 47.7% was added to the high awareness percentage of 45.8% the total percentage was 93.5%, making awareness on the existence of the disease to be very high. The level of awareness was observed to vary with the different institutions as shown in Table 3.

In the low level of awareness category, the University of Benin had 38.4% respondents, Ambrose Alli University had 15.3% while Federal Polytechnic Auchi and the College of Education had 26.9% and 19.2% respectively. Univer-

Table 3: Percentage variation in the level of awareness

<i>School</i>	<i>% no. of Low</i>	<i>% no. of medium</i>	<i>% no. of high</i>
University of Benin	38.4	19.3	28.9
Ambrose Alli University	15.3	19.8	32.2
Federal Polytechnic	26.9	29.8	19.6
College of Education	19.2	30.8	19.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2006

sity of Benin has the highest and by implication it has more students that are ignorant of the disease. In the medium level of awareness category, College of Education Ekiador had the 30.8% respondents. Federal Polytechnic Auchu had 29.8% while Ambrose Alli University and University of Benin had 19.8% and 19.3% respectively. College of Education has the highest percentage score and by implication more students are aware of the disease in that school than the other institutions. In the high-level awareness category, Ambrose Alli University had 32.2% of respondents. The University of Benin had 28.9% while the Federal Polytechnic and the College of Education had 19.6% each. Ambrose Alli University has the highest percentage score meaning that most of its students are very much acquainted with the causes, transmission, effects and prevention of the disease than students from the other institutions. Investigation into the reason for the high level of HIV-AIDS awareness in Ambrose Alli University revealed that there have been campaigns to create awareness on HIV-AIDS in the institution and very many students have attended these campaigns. Between 2005 and 2006 about 7 public lectures on this disease have been organized in the school by the university authorities, Student Union Government and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In comparison only 3 of such seminars have been organized in the University of Benin in the last two

years, while 1 has been organized at the Federal Polytechnic. None have been organized in the College of Education in the last two years. Also it was observed that students of Ambrose Alli University have complimented these public lectures with handbills, posters and stickers on the disease, which are placed in easily accessible and frequently used locations such as hostels, notice boards and classrooms.

The level of awareness between male and female students was also investigated to ascertain which of the sexes was more informed. From Table 4, female students ranked highest in the low awareness category with 3.7% while male was 2.7%. Therefore more female are not aware of the causes, spread and prevention of HIV-AIDS in the schools. In the category of medium awareness, female students score highest with 26.2% while male was 21.5%. The meaning is that more females are more knowledgeable about the disease than males. In the high awareness category, males scored 25.7% while females scored 20% making males most acquainted with the disease. It is assumed that at the medium and high levels, there is already some degree of awareness of the disease. To this end the medium and the high awareness of both sexes are compared to verify which is more aware of the disease at these levels. The male students scored highest with 189 or 50.5% while the females scored 185 or 49.5% and therefore making male students to be more aware of the disease.

THE SPREAD AND PREVENTION OF HIV IN THE INSTITUTIONS

Sex is the commonest mode of HIV infection and transmission and sex is a phenomenon currently ravaging higher institution in Nigeria. It is the distinctive characteristics of youths, of which students of higher institutions are part. A lot of students are engaged in premarital and heterosexual relationships on campus. Several factors

Table 4: Awareness level between male and female students

<i>School</i>	<i>Low</i>		<i>Medium</i>		<i>High</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
University of Benin	4	6	16	21	30	23
Ambrose Alli University	1	3	26	12	23	35
Federal Polytechnic	2	5	21	36	27	9
College of Education	4	1	23	36	23	13
Total	11	15	86	105	103	80
Percentage	2.7	3.7	21.5	26.2	25.7	20

Source: Field Survey, 2006

are responsible for this attitude, most prominent is poverty among majority of the students particularly the female students. According to Campbell (2000), pre-marital sexual activity is a prominent factor in the increasing rate of HIV-AIDS infection in Africa. Of the 400 respondents 237 or 59.2% are engaged in premarital relationships with sex while 44 or 11% have premarital relationship without sex. 64 or 16% are married. The remaining 55 or 13.7% of respondents have no sexual relationship. 59.2% is rather a high percentage of students who engage in premarital sex on campus. Among these 237 students who engage in premarital sex on campus 76 or 32% are engaged in heterosexual relationships. Data on sexual behaviours indicate that risk behaviours are very common in Nigeria (Panchaud et al. 2002). According to AVERT (2007) some 80% of HIV infection in Nigeria is transmitted by heterosexual sex.

Several precautionary measures have been advanced against infection and spread of the disease. These include abstinence, use of condom and single partner relationship. Sad enough most people do not take precautionary measures in their sexual activities. The distribution of responses on the precaution adopted in preventing the spread of the disease among single students in the institutions is shown in Table 5. This distribution was taken from the 237 students who are engaged in premarital relationship with sex. Of the measures taking against infection and spread of HIV, abstinence was 0%, the use of condom had 54.4%, other measures such as the use of drugs which is believed to build immunity against HIV-AIDS was 30.8% while those who have sex unprotected accounted 14.7%. Obviously, the number that use condom is high but the quality of condom used and number of leak that has taking place cannot be ascertained. Many of the students had admitted that they have at one time or the other experience condom leak. The number of leak taking place may be

Table 5: Prevention and spread of HIV-AIDS among single students

<i>Precautionary Measures</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Abstinence	-	0
Use of Condom	129	54.4
Other Measures	73	30.8
Unprotected	35	14.7
Total	237	100.0

Source: Field Surveys, 2006

very high and if this is added to those who have sex without protection and those who use other measures that are unknown to science to be effective, it will be discovered that HIV spread rate may actually be higher than imagined.

On the Basis of the rate of spread of the disease, the study investigated the HIV status of the students. The study shows that 96% of the students had not undertaken any voluntary HIV-AIDS screening and as such does not know their status. There is a chance of infection and spread if the status of sex partners is unknown.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has revealed that HIV awareness in Nigerian Universities is relatively high. The high rate of medium and high level awareness among students in the case of this study, is an indication that majority of our students are aware of the existence, spread and prevention of HIV-AIDS. In spite of this level of awareness however, the risk of contracting the disease is still very high. One the factors identified to be responsible in this study is the extensive unsafe sexual habits among students. A good numbers of students are involved in heterosexual relationship while very many others particularly female students are involved in widespread prostitution. Sex, which a number of our youths in the higher institution are involved in, remains the most single important means of contracting HIV (Fasakin and Olorewaju 2004). After few years of contracting the virus, HIV infected person develops full-blown AIDS which kills. Although with screening and the application of antirritoviral drugs, the lives of those with the virus have been prolonged there is however no known cure for the disease.

Because of high level illicit sexual habits, many students unknown to them are today carriers of the virus while others are at risk of contracting and spreading the disease. This is a generation problem, which must be tackled with all resources to save the lives of our brilliant and talented youths. To effectively do this, this study has recommended the following. First, this study observed that awareness campaign was lacking in most of the institutions, as some have not witness or organized any form of HIV-AID symposia or rally in many years. To a great extent this has limited the amount of information available to the students. Therefore it is recommend-

ed that awareness campaigns should be intensified in all higher institutions, to help sensitize the students. In this regard symposia, lecture and rallies on HIV-AIDS should be organized at least twice a year for the students. Also billboards, posters, handbills and stickers should be provided for the students to further increase their awareness. The campaign should be all involving and government and the private sector should be seen playing the leading role. In particular, the federal and state ministries of health, national and state committee on aids and other government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the institution authorities should see this task as necessary at this time. Sensitization efforts through the public media should also be intensified. Through appropriate legislation all public and private radio and television stations, newspapers and magazines houses should be made to collaborate in prosecuting the war on HIV-AIDS. The television stations, which have larger viewers, should introduce more serious and pragmatic advertisement that will make people understand the dangers of HIV infection.

This study also recommends that people particularly the students should be encouraged to know their HIV-AIDS status. With the status known, the rate of spread will not only reduce but lives will be saved, as those infected will be placed on antiretroviral medication for prolonged life. Through appropriate legislation by government, students should now be made to declare their HIV-AIDS status as pre-requisite for employment in the public and private sectors. This in no doubt will induce people to live more careful lives that will reduce the rate of infection.

This study has revealed that students of 20-30 age bracket constitute the majority in Nigerian campuses, they are also the more sexually active population and the most vulnerable to HIV-AIDS infection. This study therefore recommends students of this age bracket should be engaged more in productive ventures rather than ideas geared towards promoting sex. In this regard students should be engaged more in sports and other vocational ventures rather than parties and beauty pageants. Also all institutions should adopt moderate dress codes for students. Female students should be of particular interest

because of the decaying state of their dressing which has almost reached the state of nudity on campus.

Action should be taken by all concerned at individual and community level to avoid contracting the disease by delaying sexual intercourse, as abstinence is the only sure protection. Also when one decides sexual intercourse is appropriate, it should be with a partner who has been tested and has not engaged in risky sexual behaviour in the past and it should be a mutually faithful, long-term relationship. Still to mention, if sexual intercourse outside a mutually exclusive relationship is chosen, latex condoms should be used each and every time, remembering that condoms are not foolproof. Lastly individuals should not involve his/herself in any kind of drugs with the belief that immunity will be built against the disease. Students and the general public are advised to go to designate centres for counseling if they are positive to the virus.

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