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Determinants of HIV transmission and sexual risk practices among women of childbearing age in semi-urban communities of Rivers State, Nigeria

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Sexual risk behaviors are among the key drivers of the HIV epidemic in Nigeria, where heterosexual transmission accounts for 80-95% of all infections. Women are disproportionately affected, with infection rates two to three times higher compared with men, and also accounting for 31% of all new infections. This study was aimed at identifying the determinants of HIV transmission and sexual risk practices among women in order to address their peculiar intervention needs and to minimize the mother-to-child transmission of the virus. Data was generated from 769 women of child bearing age in semi-urban communities of River State, Nigeria in November 2013. Data was analyzed in SPSS version 20 with $p < 0.05$ considered significant. Majority (85.6%) of the women were sexually exposed, with a third (37.2%) engaged in sexual risk practices which included early sexual debut (<15 years) (16.7%), multiple sexual relationships (12.9%), use of alcohol (29.6%) and or illicit drugs (5.9%) before sex and occasional or inconsistent condom use (22.4%). Logistic regression analysis showed that women with poor knowledge of HIV were more prone to sexual risks. Also, younger women (15-24 years) were 2.2 times more likely to engage in sexual risk practices than older women (25-49 years), [O.R (95% C.I) = 1.571 (1.106-2.231)], $p=0.012$, and the singles 2.5 times more at risk than married, [O.R (95% C.I) = 1.714 (1.190-2.469)], $p=0.004$. There is need to focus on peer education and curriculum-based sexuality education in schools in order to improve knowledge about HIV among women of childbearing age.

Biography

Charles I Tobin-West is a Public Health Physician and Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology and Primary Health Care at the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. He is also a Honorary Consultant Community Physician and Chairman Medical advisory Committee/Director Clinical Services and Training at the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital. He holds MD, MPH degrees and is a Fellow of the Faculty of Public Health of the National Postgraduate College of Nigeria. He has over 25 publications to his credit.

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