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Knowledge and perception of HIV/AIDS among young people

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Introduction: Globally, the spread of HIV/AIDS remains on the rise with young people at increased risk of infection. Africa alone represents the majority of HIV/AIDS cases, where the young aged 16-30, are at the greatest risk. In Nigeria, despite the high prevalence of the disease, research suggests that there is high level of knowledge of HIV transmission among young people. Sexual behaviour change remains the most effective way of preventing further transmission. The purpose of this research is to explore the knowledge and perception of first year university student towards HIV/AIDS in Southern Nigeria.

Aim: To gain the knowledge needed to develop appropriate interventions that will enable young people to adopt safe sexual practices.

Material and methods: A non-experimental descriptive study was conducted among randomly selected 240 first year university students. The HIV Knowledge Questionnaire and a focus group discussion were used to measure participants' knowledge and perception towards HIV/AIDS. Descriptive statistics, t-test, correlation and regression analysis were used for analysis.

Results: The results from the HIV Knowledge Questionnaire revealed lower knowledge on the various vertical modes of HIV transmission. The t-test demonstrated no significant difference was found between gender [t (160)=-0.525, p=0.600]. The correlation analysis indicated using chi square, a significant associations between gender and correct response for six questions. Apearson's correlation was performed to explore the association between participant age and knowledge. A significant association was found (Pearson's r=0.135, p=0.043). This means that as age increased, knowledge also increased. Those who perceived themselves at risk of infection were significant. Using the AIDS Risk Reduction Model (ARRM), it was found that the students are in the first stage of behaviour change process: recognition of the problem.

Conclusion: The study findings demonstrate the call to address this knowledge gap among a known population vulnerable to risky sexual behaviour. The awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS is high among the selected students. However, risk perception is low with high-risk sexual behaviours. The failure to perceive HIV/AIDS as a personal risk has prevented commitment to behaviour change. Interventions aimed at influencing risk perception are paramount to curb the spread of this dreaded disease.

Biography

Oguogho Cletus completed his Masters in Public Health and partnership in Care at Swansea University, UK at the age of 29. Before then he had bagged a Bachelor's degree in Pure and Applied Chemistry and have served as a national youth service leader for campaign against tropical diseases including HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. Further, he has served as the Oasis Magazine editor (A catholic bi-annual magazine at his local parish in Ekpoma, Nigeria). Cletus have written some inspirational books and presented papers in seminars. His master's degree dissertation paper is currently at the press in the UK for publication. He is presently working as Quality Control supervisor for SP-OFFSHORE energy services in Nigeria.

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