

## AIDS Awareness And Knowledge Among Primary School Children In Port Harcourt Metropolis.

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### ABSTRACT

*The research was carried out to study the AIDS awareness and knowledge of 462 final year primary school pupils selected by multistage sampling technique from four primary school in Port Harcourt metropolis.*

*Ninety - seven point six percent pupils reported that they had heard of AIDS. Only 47.6% knew the correct meaning of AIDS, among whom 63.2% were in private schools. Fifty nine point one percent knew that AIDS was transmitted sexually and only 1.3% knew about vertical transmission. Between 0.2 - 28.4% had wrong or no knowledge about the accurate route of transmission of AIDS.*

*Limited and inaccurate knowledge of the preventive measures of AIDS were demonstrated. Sixty eight (23.8%) were not aware of any preventive measures. The pupils main source of information on AIDS was the mass media. Parents contributed to the knowledge in 8.0% of the respondents.*

*There is therefore an urgent need to intensify and expand the ongoing AIDS campaign especially school based AIDS education programmes to primary school pupils before they enter into secondary and tertiary institutions and become influenced by the peers.*

*Informed parents and religious leaders should also be involved in AIDS education in order to improve the knowledge of children and alter their misconceptions about AIDS transmission and prevention.*

**KEY WORDS:** AIDS; Awareness; Knowledge; Primary school children.

### INTRODUCTION

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has continued to spread at an alarming rate<sup>1-6</sup>. In 1997 it was estimated that

over 30million people globally were living with HIV infection, with 1.1million being children under the age of 15years<sup>1</sup>. WHO estimated that about 10million children throughout the world would be infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) by the year 2000<sup>7</sup>.

The overwhelming majority of the HIV - infected people (more than 90%) live in the developing world. Sub-saharan African is the region with the fastest moving epidemic<sup>1-6</sup>. Nigerian contribution to the global HIV burden as at the end of 1998 was 9%<sup>2</sup>.

AIDS epidemic is exacting an especially heavy toll (eg. increased mortality, human suffering, economic burden, AIDS orphans and increased burden of medical care) in Nigeria<sup>6-10</sup>. Adolescents are recognized as a group of concern in the rapidly growing HIV/AIDS pandemic, not only for their unprotected sexual activity but for their propensity to have multiple sexual partners<sup>11-17</sup>.

In most advanced and developing countries knowledge of AIDS is gained from many sources, and it is vulnerable to misconception<sup>18,19</sup>. Relatively little research exists on the knowledge of primary school children in Port Harcourt on AIDS. This is essential in order to design an effective HIV/AIDS education intervention program to stem the increase in this infection before the children enter secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This study was carried out among primary school children in Port Harcourt metropolis to assess their awareness and knowledge of AIDS.

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The population sampled were in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, it comprised children from four primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. The schools were selected by stratified random sampling from government approved primary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area (PHALGA). The schools were stratified based on the location (urban, periurban) and proprietorship status (private, public). The selected schools consisted of 2 urban (1 private, 1 public) and 2 periurban, public schools. All the schools were day schools.

A minimum sample size of 400 was calculated using the formula<sup>20</sup>  $p \times q / SE^2$ . We assumed that 50% of the pupils had correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS, and a sampling error tolerated of 2.5%. A total of 500 copies of the questionnaires were prepared so as to take care of non-responses. Permission for the study was obtained from the Director, Primary Schools Board and the Head teachers' of the study schools. Informed consent was given by the pupils.

### Data Collection

A structured pretested questionnaire on AIDS knowledge was administered to a random sample of 500 final year primary school pupils in the study schools. A minimum of one hundred pupils were randomly selected from each school by systematic method. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information on the subjects age, sex and type of school. Knowledge of AIDS, modes of transmission, methods of prevention and source of information on AIDS were assessed. Each respondent was requested to fill in the questionnaire independently within thirty minutes in the school-halls. The study was anonymous, and the teachers were not allowed to participate during the filling of the questionnaires to encourage honest responses. The responses to some of the questions were Yes or No, while few were open ended.

## RESULTS

Four hundred and sixty two (92.4%) questionnaires were duly completed and submitted. The age range of the respondents was 9 to 18 years (mean 11.4 years), with a male - female ratio of 1.1:1 (Table I).

### Knowledge of AIDS

Four hundred and fifty one (97.6%) respondents claimed to have heard of AIDS. Two hundred and twenty (47.6%) pupils knew the correct meaning of AIDS, out of which 63.2 percent were in private school. The knowledge of the respondents on the mode of transmission of AIDS is shown in Table II. The importance of 'sexual intercourse' as a mode of transmission was known by 273 (59.1%) pupils. Only 6 (1.3%) respondents knew about vertical transmission. One hundred and thirty one (28.4%) did not know any of the routes of transmission for AIDS.

The accuracy of the perceived knowledge on method of transmission ranged from 0.5 - 59.1 percent while between 0.2 - 28.4 percent had wrong or no knowledge about the accurate source of AIDS.

Two hundred and eighty six (61.9%) respondents believed that AIDS can be prevented, while 82 (17.7%) said it cannot be prevented. The commonest methods of AIDS prevention known by the 286 pupils were condom (34.3%) and abstinence (19.9%) as shown in Table III. Six (2.1%) claimed that prevention can be achieved by prayers/church, 16 (5.6%) by not having physical contact with victims. However, 68 (23.8%) were not aware of any preventive measures. Inaccurate responses ranged from 0.3 - 5.2 percent.

### Source of Information

The results of our enquiries about the respondents' sources of information on AIDS indicated that the main source of information were the television (60.4%) and radio (25.5%). This was followed by school teachers (8.7%). Parents accounted for 8.0%, friends 4.3% and only 0.6% from church.

**Table I: Distribution of the respondents according to selected demographic characteristics.**

Characteristics	Number of respondents	(%)
<b>Age group (years)</b>		
Less than 10	22	4.8
10 – 13	387	83.8
14 - 17.	43	9.3
18 – 19	1	0.2
Don't know		
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	238	51.5
Female	224	48.5
<b>Schools</b>		
Private	180	39.0
Public	282	61.0

**Table II: Possible modes of transmission of AIDS as indicated by the respondents.**

Transmission of AIDS	Number of respondents	(%)
Sexual Intercourse	273	59.1
Blood transfusion	28	6.1
Use of razor, injections.	16	3.5
From mother during delivery	6	1.3
Kissing	2	0.4
Insect bite	2	0.4
Sleeping with dog	3	0.6
Dog bite	2	0.4
Physical contact with victim	28	6.1
Snake bite	1	0.2
Dirty Environment	4	0.9
Hereditary	2	0.4
Don't know	131	28.4

Some respondents cited multiple sources.

**Table III: Measures for prevention of AIDS known to respondents.**

Methods of AIDS Prevention	Number of respondents	(%)
Condom use	98	34.3
Sexual abstinence	57	19.9
Prayers/Church	6	2.1
Avoid sex with prostitutes	23	8.0
Premarital screening	4	1.4
Avoid sex with victims	4	1.4
Cleanliness	5	1.7
Avoid physical contact with victims	16	5.6
Avoid blood transfusion	2	0.7
Avoid sex with dogs	1	0.3
Medical carefulness	15	5.2
Don't know	68	23.8

Some respondents had multiple answers.

## DISCUSSION

The present study supports previous studies that there is high awareness of AIDS among respondents<sup>15-17, 19</sup>. Fawole et al<sup>16</sup> reported that 90% of secondary school students had heard about AIDS and could describe it correctly, while Odujinrin and Akinkuade reported the awareness in 98% of secondary school students in Lagos State<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, in Tanzania a national household survey revealed that 98% of those questioned knew of AIDS. The high AIDS awareness noted in this study may be due to high publicity from the on going AIDS campaign in the media.

Although, 97.6 percent of the respondents reported that they had heard of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), critical analysis of the responses shown in Table II, indicated that majority did not have the correct knowledge about AIDS and its mode of transmission. That dog bite (0.4%), dirty environment (0.9%) and physical contact with victim (6.1%) were mentioned as routes of AIDS transmission shows their misconceptions regarding the modes of AIDS transmission. Similar confusion about transmission of AIDS has been reported in previous studies<sup>15-18</sup>.

Pupils in public schools had poorer knowledge compared to those in private schools. Only 36.8 percent of pupils in public schools knew the correct meaning of AIDS. This may be the result of incessant industrial action by teachers in government schools in Port Harcourt, with falling standard of education in Nigeria.

A poor understanding of preventive measures was also demonstrated by respondents. As shown in Table III, only 34.3% knew that the use of condoms was a preventive measure for AIDS. This finding compares with those from studies in Tanzania, where Klepp and Lugoe<sup>19</sup> found that 39% of women aged 15 to 49 years in their national household survey mentioned condoms as a way of preventing AIDS, while it contrasts with reports by Odujinrin and Akinkuade who noted that only 0.7% of their population knew condom as preventive measure<sup>17</sup>. The result of our study indicate the existence of inaccurate knowledge on the prevention of AIDS.

The fact that most of the respondents heard about AIDS in the media shows the importance of the mass media in promoting

HIV/AIDS campaign. This study has revealed that parents are not active sex and sexuality educators for their children. A previous Nigerian study revealed that youths preferred their parents as sex educators<sup>21</sup>.

The prospects for HIV/AIDS control depend largely on recognizing the scale of the threat and implementing policies to counter it. It is not enough to increase the awareness of children about AIDS, but also to impart accurate knowledge on the routes of transmission and on methods of prevention, in order to successfully control HIV epidemics among the younger generations. This may mean changing the overall approach to the dissemination of AIDS information and making it more detailed.

As HIV/AIDS - risk behaviours have been reported among children in primary schools there is therefore need for early intervention at home. We implore informed parents and religious leaders to discuss about HIV/AIDS with their young children at home/church before they enter into secondary and tertiary schools and become influenced by their peers. Effective AIDS education campaign with its inclusion into primary school curriculum is advocated to improve the knowledge of children as well as alter their misconceptions about AIDS transmission and prevention. This is important so that these young children can stay free of HIV infection and form a reservoir of healthy parents.

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