



ACTIVITIES OF SOCIAL WORKERS AND HIV/AIDS AWARENESS AMONG COMMERCIAL SEX WORKERS IN CALABAR MUNICIPAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study investigated the activities of Social Workers and Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDs) awareness among Commercial Sex Workers in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. The two null hypotheses were tested each at .05 alpha level of significance in this study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. A total of three hundred and eighty (380) respondents were selected from the population of nine hundred and eighty (980) commercial sex workers in the study area. A well developed and validated questionnaire titled “Activities of Social Workers and HIV/AIDs awareness among Commercial Sex Workers (ASWHAACSWQ)” was used to collect data for the study. Simple regression analysis was used for data analysis. The results revealed that peer education and sex education significantly relate with HIV/AIDs awareness among Commercial Sex Workers in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Based on the result of the findings, it was recommended among others that Government and relevant agencies should create employment opportunities for the commercial sex workers so as to reduce the rate and numbers of commercial sex workers in the study area.

Keywords: Awareness, commercial sex workers, social worker, Hiv/Aids.

Introduction

The issue of HIV and AIDs is not common concept in Nigeria. HIV/AIDs campaigns are everywhere to ensure that individuals, especially the youths who are more susceptible to this menace, do not get themselves involved. The rationale is that HIV/AIDs plague has condemned a lot of young lives that would have contributed to the growth of their families, themselves and the nation at large. Thus,



the need for a behavioral change among these set of people. Behavioral change can be referred to as any transformation or modification of human [behavior](#). It is the shift in overt and covert activities of an individual that is adjudged to affects his physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing (Sule, 2019). Behavioral change is a shift in the traditional way of doing a thing. Behavioral change among sex workers is expected to be positive, that is, giving the prevalence of HIV/AIDs over time and the number of potentials that have been wasted by virtue of this menace, one expects that there will be a shift in the activities of sex workers.

Researchers such as Awofala and Ogundele (2016) and Sule (2019) have witnessed and observed lack of behavior changes among sex workers. This is often in statements that they express, such as ‘something must kill a person’, I do not care about HIV/AIDS, it is not my portion, but the activities of these sex workers expose them deeply to contacting the virus. These state of affairs have raised series of concern within social workers, community developers, feminists and other social agents over what would have been the causes of sex worker's lack of behavior change on HIV/AIDS. World Health Organization (WHO), February 2018, reported that HIV remains the main world commercial wellbeing problem, possessing proof additional than 35 million in the world are currently suffering from the virus. In 2016, 1.0 million individuals died from AIDS-associated results worldwide. Awofala and Ogundele (2016) observed that HIV prevalence among adults in Nigeria is relatively low (3.2%), yet Nigeria is an enormous country where HIV infection remains an issue that demands a systematic and highly tailored intervention”. The authors further asserted that HIV/AIDs is easily transmitted from infected commercial sex workers to their clients, men having sex with men and pregnant women to their unborn child (especially those who do not seek counselling). Hilary (2016), Yovil (2016) and Finai (2015), ascribed lack of behavioral change among female sex workers to poverty, peer influence, parental training, level of education, poor policy implementation on sex workers, the politicization of policy regarding sex workers among others. The effect of these poor behavioral changes is that it has caused a lot of manpower loss in the system. An improve access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information among young people could be obtained through peer education. Peer education is an approach to health promotion, in which community members are supported to promote health-enhancing change among their peers.

Efforts by social workers, feminists, community development workers and other social change agents is to ensure that sex workers change their attitude and behaviour have not yielded the right result. For example, campaign programs and awareness have been carried out on different fora, these include programs designed to increase their knowledge of HIV, increase condom use with clients through provision of free condoms and condom negotiation skills, free HIV Voluntary



Counseling and Testing (VCT) through venue-based out-reach and linkages to dedicated VCT centers, application of peer education plus prevention activities for brothel-based FSWs (BB-FSWs) and Priority for Local AIDS Control Efforts, an intervention outreach program for non-brothel-based FSWs(NBB-FSWs). These activities have been implemented since 2007 and are usually implemented by trained social workers, feminists, community development workers and other social change agents. It is based on the above that this study sought to investigate the activities of social workers and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.

The study examined the relationship between

1. peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers in Calabar
2. sex education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers in Calabar

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study;

H₀₁ There is no significant relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers in Calabar Municipal Council Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.

H₀₂ There is no significant relationship between sex education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers in Calabar Municipal Council Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Literature review

Peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers

Peer education can be described as learning from one's peers. It is the process of sharing information among members of a specific community or group of young people to achieve positive outcomes for health and well-being. According to Abdi and Simbar (2019), a peer is a person who has equal standing with another as in age, background, social status, and interests. Therefore, peer education is the process of sharing knowledge and experiences among members of a group who have similar concerns and characteristics, to achieve positive health outcomes. In other words, peer education is a series of educational strategies presented by members of a subculture, society, or a group of people for their peers. Adoption of peer education as an education strategy became necessary as a result of failures in the educational system. The effectiveness of this approach to learning is based on the theory that the passage of sensitive information is easier between people of the same age group. Similarly, based on the theory of social awareness, peers tend to imitate the behavior of someone they consider a model. International research



studies by Ghys (2021) show that peer education can make a valuable contribution to the prevention of risky behaviors. The purpose of the peer education method is thus to enhance the knowledge, attitude, and skills of commercial sex workers, adolescents and young adults, towards the promotion of healthy behaviours

Ghys (2021) investigated the relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among female sexual initiators. Survey research design was adopted for the study, simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 150 respondents for the study. Data was collected using a questionnaire and inquiries posed included verifying peer education impacts on HIV/AIDS awareness creation among commercial sex workers. Means scores were used to analyse obtained data which revealed that increased peer education leads to high sensitization of commercial sex workers on the causes and preventive measures in tackling HIV/AIDS pandemic. Summarily, the findings meant that peer education leads to proper awareness creation on the dangers of HIV/AIDS in the area and also to their community as well. Also, Society for Family Health (2022) implemented a peer education intervention (*MTV Shuga Naija Peer Education Project*) among young people aged 15–24 years in Kaduna and Kano States, Nigeria. This study presents findings on the effectiveness of peer-education in addressing myths, misconceptions and improving knowledge on sexual and reproductive health issues. The knowledge and opinion of the project beneficiaries were assessed before and after exposure to the project's interventions (the MTV Shuga drama series and peer education). Findings from both assessments were compared and the results were presented in this article. In total, 8930 persons between the age of 15–24 years were assessed. The findings revealed that 75% of the respondents after exposure to the project's intervention correctly identified that condom use can prevent pregnancy and that lower abdominal pain is a sign of sexually transmitted illnesses. Significant improvement was observed for most of other questions that the respondents were asked about. The study concluded that the peer education strategy used in this study resulted in the knowledge of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted illnesses, contraception, and other reproductive health issues among young people. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that the use of peer-to-peer education should be encouraged and consistently adopted to improve knowledge of pertinent health issues among young people.

Peer education has been described as a core pillar of HIV prevention efforts globally and has been found to be effective at improving knowledge and promoting attitudinal and behavioural change (Abdi and Simbar, 2019). Adolescents who believe their friends are not in favour of sexual intercourse for teenagers have been found to be more likely not to engage in sexual intercourse, and those who perceive their peers as having a favourable attitude toward condom use are more likely to use a condom themselves. By using peers as resources, information, skills, and



caring can be extended in an exponential way and the social climate can be enhanced. Peer education and support can be especially effective among adolescents because friends are their main sources of information about sexual practices, and peer influence often motivates their behavior. Abdi and Simbar (2019) investigated peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among female commercial sex workers in Edo State, Nigeria. Correlational survey research design was adopted for the study, simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 200 respondents for the study. Data was collected using a questionnaire. SPSS statistical tool was used to analyze the obtained data. Finding revealed that increased peer education leads to high awareness creation among female commercial sex workers. Summarily, the findings meant that peer education leads to proper awareness creation on the dangers of HIV/AIDS in the area and also to their community as well.

Sex education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers

Sex education is a vital aspect of health education curriculum. It provides factual knowledge to assist parents and teachers, children and adolescents to avoid sex related problems. The knowledge also includes ways of helping children develop self-respect, sexual understanding, define the values of interpersonal relationships and strengthen communication skills in sex and education. This promotes a wholesome and stable sex life. It is necessary for parents and teachers to acquire scientific, social, and psychological understanding of the need for sex education. The sexual revolutions among contemporary youths recommend sex education as an imperative for adolescents that should be protected from the harmful effects of deviant sexual behaviors. In 2022, Simon (2022) asserted that sex education which is sometime called sexuality education or sex and relationships attitudes is the process of acquiring information and forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexual identity, relationship and intimacy. It is also about developing young people's skills so that they make informed choices about their behaviors and feel confidence and competent about acting on these choices. Sex education is a well planned and designed education scheme to instruct the young ones and adolescent to acquire knowledge, skills and understanding of the need for sex so that they can fit into the society as desirable member of the community. In the view of Orji and Anikweze (2018) sex education refers to instruction about sex and related issues such as the sexual organs and their functions, the reproduction process, equality between sexes, hygiene during menstruation, and dangers of unwholesome sexual activities. According to Hershel (2016), sex education is a powerful force and its true meaning has to be revealed to adolescent to enable them make rational decision based on self-control and personal code of conduct. Hershel (2016) also noted "teenagers seem to know enough to get into bed but not enough to stay out of trouble". Therefore, sex education is desired to replace ignorance, fear, secrecy and guilt with



knowledge understanding, openness and rationality. Jorgensen (2022) maintained that contemporary adolescents in secondary schools have access to formal sex education but indirectly in their biology, home economics and social studies. Students also acquire substantial knowledge about sex and love from literature, books, novels and films. It would therefore be naïve for adults to object to instructional need for sex education for adolescents in schools. In the view of Hilgard (2022), the adolescents need sex education in order to learn the acceptable forms of expressing sexual appetite without running into the dangers of unexpected consequence. Sex education seeks both to reduce the risks of potentially negative outcome from sexual behavior like unwanted or unplanned pregnancies and infection with sexually transmitted diseases, and to enhance the quality of relationship. It is also about developing young people's ability to make decision over their entire lifetime, the need for sex education that work by which we mean that it is effective the need for sex education that contribute to this over all aim. Effective sex education develops young people's skills in negotiation, decision-making assertion and listening. Other important skills include being able to recognize pressures from other people and to resists them, seeking help from adult including parents, careers and professionals through the family, community, health and welfare services. Simon (2022) opined that sexual education also help equip young people with skills to be able to differentiate between accurate and inaccurate information, discuss and range of mortal and social issues and perspectives on sex and sexuality, including different cultural attitudes and sensitive issue like sexuality, abortion and contraception.

Goshie, Joshua and Matthew (2021) averred that for sex education to be effective, it need to include opportunity for young people to develop skills as it can be hard for them to act on the basis of only having information. The kinds of skills young people develop as part of sex education are linked to more general skills. For examples, being able to communicate, listen, negotiate, ask for, and identify sources of help and advice, are useful life-skills and can be applied in terms of sexual relationships (Goshie, Joshua and Matthew, 2021). Simon (2022) stated that young people can be exposed to a wide range of attitude and belief in relation to sex and sexuality. These sometime appear contradictory. For example, some health messages emphasis a risk and danger associated with sexual activities and some media coverage promote the idea that being sexually active makes the person more attractive and mature. Because sex and sexuality is a sensitive subject, young people and sex educators can have strong views on what attitudes people should hold, and what moral framework should govern people's behavior – these can sometime seem to be at odds. Young people are very interested in the oral and cultural framework that binds sex and sexuality. They often welcome opportunities to talk about issues where people have strong views, like abortion, sex before



marriage, lesbianism and gay issue and contraception and birth control (Simon, 2022). It is important to remember that talking in a balanced way about differences in opinion does not promote one set of view over another or mean that one agrees with a particular view. Part of exploring and understanding cultural, religion and oral view is being able to agree people provided they have attitudes and believes of their own about sex and sexuality and it is important not let these influence negatively. For example, even if a person believes that young people should not have sex until they are married, this does not imply withholding important information about safer sex and contraception.

Methodology

The survey research type was adopted for this study. Osuala (2013) asserts that the survey research is the systematic way of measuring variables by asking people questions and then examine relationship among the variables. The survey research design attempts to obtain a picture of the present conditions of a particular phenomenon. The population of this study comprise of 980 female sex workers selected from 28 hotels, brothels and guest houses in the study area. The sex workers were considered appropriate for the study because of their level of experience and exposure to unprotected sex. A manageable and sizeable sample size of 380 female sex workers drawn from ten hotels/lodgings using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The choice of 380 female sex workers for the study was based on the availability and willingness of the respondents to be part of the study. A questionnaire titled: Activities of Social Workers in creating HIV/AIDs Awareness among Commercial Sex Workers Questionnaire (ASWCHAACSWQ) served as the study instrument for data collection. The instrument was designed by the researcher and validated by three experts. One in measurement and evaluation and two in department of continuing education and development studies, University of Calabar – Calabar. The reliability of the instrument was conducted on 50 respondents outside the study area. A set of items was administered to the respondents after an interval of two weeks. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to test the degree of consistency of the instrument. They were found to range from .72 to .87. This implies that the instrument was reliable enough to be used for this investigation. The procedure for data analysis was based on the already structured research hypotheses. Simple regression statistical technique was used to analyzed data for the study.

Presentation of results

The two research hypotheses were stated and tested in order to provide solution to the problem of this study. Each hypothesis was tested at .05 significant level.

Hypothesis one



There is no significant relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers in Calabar Municipal Council Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. The independent variable in this hypothesis is peer education while the dependent variable is HIV/AIDS awareness, measured continuously. To test this hypothesis, a simple linear regression analysis was used and the result presented in table 1.

The results of the simple regression analysis presented in Table 1 examine the relationship between peer education (independent variable) and HIV/AIDS awareness (dependent variable) among commercial sex workers. The f-ratio of 27.0 is statistically significant at a p-value of .000, indicating a strong and meaningful relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness. This suggests that peer education plays a significant role in influencing HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers. The R-value (.423) indicates a moderate positive correlation between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness. This means that as peer education efforts increase, there is a corresponding increase in the level of HIV/AIDS awareness among the participants. The R² value (.274) shows that 27.4% of the variation in HIV/AIDS awareness can be explained by peer education. In other words, peer education accounts for approximately 27.4% of the changes in awareness levels, while the remaining 72.6% can be attributed to other factors not included in this model. The adjusted R² value (.273), which is slightly lower than the R² value, confirms the stability and reliability of the model when adjusted for the number of predictors and sample size. In summary, the regression analysis demonstrates that peer education significantly contributes to increasing HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers, explaining about a quarter of the variation in awareness levels. These findings accentuate the importance of peer education as a strategic intervention in HIV/AIDS awareness programs within this population

Table 1

Simple regression analysis of the relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	f-ratio	p-values
Between	918	1	918		
Within	10336.00	304	34	27.0*	.000
Total	11254.00	305			

R=.423, R²=.274 Adj. R²=.273

Hypothesis two

The results from Table 2 present a simple regression analysis exploring the relationship between sex education (independent variable) and HIV/AIDS awareness (dependent variable) among commercial sex workers. The f-ratio of



32.79 is statistically significant at a p-value of .000, indicating a highly significant relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness. This result suggests that peer education is a strong predictor of HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers. The R-value (.654) indicates a strong positive correlation between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness. This means that higher levels of peer education are associated with higher levels of HIV/AIDS awareness among participants. The R² value (.429) reveals that 42.9% of the variation in HIV/AIDS awareness can be explained by peer education. In other words, peer education accounts for nearly 43% of the changes in awareness levels, while the remaining 57.1% can be attributed to other factors not included in this model. The adjusted R² value (.427), which is only slightly lower than the R² value, suggests that the model is stable and reliable even after accounting for the number of predictors and sample size. Given the p value of .000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness. Peer education is an important predictor of HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers.

Table 2

Simple regression analysis of the relationship between sex education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	f-ratio	p-values
Between	1095.8	1	1095.8		
Within	10158.2	304	33.41	32.79*	.000
Total	11254.00	305			

R=.654, R² =.429; Adj. R² =.427

Discussion of findings

Peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers

The regression analysis demonstrates that peer education significantly contributes to increasing HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers, explaining about a quarter of the variation in awareness levels. These findings accentuate the importance of peer education as a strategic intervention in HIV/AIDS awareness programs within this population. The findings of this study is in line with that of Abdi & Simbar (2019), who opined that a peer is a person who has equal standing with another as in age, background, social status, and interests. The findings is also similar to that of Ghys (2021) who investigated the relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness among female sexual initiators.

Sex education and HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers



The regression analysis demonstrates that peer education significantly and positively contributes to HIV/AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers, explaining a substantial portion of the variation in awareness levels. These findings highlight the critical role of peer education as an effective intervention for improving HIV/AIDS awareness in this population. The findings of the study is similar to that of Hershel (2016), who opined that sex education is a powerful force and its true meaning has to be revealed to adolescent to enable them make rational decision based on self-control and personal code of conduct. The finding of the study is also similar to that of Goshie, Joshua. Matthew, (2021) that the inclusion of sex education into the secondary school curriculum will have a significant impact in the fight against HIV/AIDs and other. Based on the findings, it was concluded that peer education, sex education, HIV/AIDs testing/treatment and counselling services are significant activities of social workers used in HIV/AIDs awareness creation among sex workers in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that peer education, sex education, HIV/AIDs testing/treatment and counselling services are significant activities of social workers and used in HIV/AIDs awareness creation among sex workers in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Based on the findings of the regression analysis, which demonstrates a significant relationship between peer education and HIV/AIDS awareness, it is recommended that peer education programs be further expanded and integrated into HIV prevention efforts among commercial sex workers.
2. It was also recommended that peer education programs be scaled up and incorporated into comprehensive HIV prevention strategies for this population. These programs should focus on enhancing knowledge, correcting misconceptions, and promoting safer sexual practices.

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