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Awareness of HIV/AIDS among primary school pupils in north central region of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the knowledge of HIV/AIDS among primary school pupils in north central area of Nigeria. **Methods:** 2000 randomly selected primary school pupils in and around eastern part of Idoma area of Benue state were interviewed using an open-ended questionnaire. Data analysis was done with EPI-INFO 2000. The *Chi*-square test was used for statistical analysis and the 0.05 level of significance was adopted. **Results:** A total of 1010 males and 990 females at ages between five and sixteen years were drawn from 10 primary schools in the area. Pupils in the higher classes were more knowledgeable and sex difference was not statistically significant. Certain misconceptions were noted. **Conclusions:** There is need for health education for all cadres of primary school pupils in the area, which will increase the awareness of the disease.

1. Introduction

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is caused by Human immune deficiency virus (HIV)[1–4]. It has resulted in the greatest public health concern since 1981. AIDS is a global pandemic. HIV is blood borne and commonly transmitted by exchange of body fluids during sexual intercourse, and from mother to child during pregnancy[1,2]. Children may get the virus from breast feeding, and sharing sharp objects while playing with infected fellows[3].

Therefore it can not be an understatement that a good understanding of the disease would go a long way in reducing the transmission of the disease. Primary school pupils need to avoid any contact with potentially infected fluids. The fear of AIDS and its consequences rank number one as the greatest medical anxiety in our population in recent times and as long as there is no specific and effective cure, our main line of defence must remain an educated public[3,4].

Therefore, the study is aimed at determining the knowledge of HIV/AIDS among primary school pupils in

Idoma community of Benue State, Nigeria, and knowledge about the prevention against the HIV infection.

2. Subjects and methods

Otukpo is the traditional headquarter of Idoma people. It is located in north central part of Nigeria; bounded by Enugu State on the east, Cross River State on the west and Makurdi on the north, Kogi State on the south. It is a local government area with a neighboring local government area called Apa. There are many primary schools in these predominantly populated Idoma local government areas. Ten primary schools in the study was selected by simple random sampling method.

An open-ended questionnaire on personal data and aspects of knowledge of etiology diagnosis, transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS infection was administered on randomly selected pupils who were willing to participate in the study from ten primary schools in the area. A total of 2000 pupils were interviewed. They were drawn from class 1 to 6. Two hundred pupils were drawn from each school. Five schools each from Otukpo local government area and Apa local government area were selected.

Data entry and analysis were done with the software EPI-INFO 2000. Statistical analysis was done with the *Chi*-square test and the 0.05 level of significance was adopted.

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3. Results

A total of two thousand (2000) pupils were interviewed. 1010 (50.5%) were males, while 990 (49.5%) were females, giving male to female ratio of 1:1.

Out of the 2000 pupils studied, 980 (49%) of them claimed knowledge of HIV/AIDS, among which 320 (33%) were in class 5, and 294 (30%) were in class 6 (Table 1).

The pupils had the knowledge of the disease from their churches (53%), parents (35%) and from their school teachers (10%). Others learnt of HIV/AIDS from public enlightenment campaigns (5%), radio (5%) and television (2%).

The parameters used to assess the knowledge of HIV/AIDS in respondents were 1) Causative agent of HIV/AIDS; 2) Mode of transmission; 3) AIDS has no cure; 4) Manifestation of HIV/AIDS; 5) Preventive/ control measures against HIV infection.

15% of the children had the understanding of the cause of disease and its implications. Only 10% of them know the modes of transmission of HIV infection, 20% of them are aware of the various ways the disease presents, 30% of them know there is no cure for the disease, while 25% of the pupils are aware of the preventive/ control measures (Table 1).

Table 1
Knowledge of HIV/AIDS among the pupils in the north central Nigeria.

Age	Class	Cause	MOT	CLIN	Cure	Contra	Total
5-<6	1	4	10	9	8	2	33 (3%)
6-<7	2	10	11	12	15	7	55 (6%)
7-<8	3	13	10	20	43	22	108 (11%)
8-<9	4	20	12	30	58	50	170 (17%)
9-<12	5	40	25	60	100	95	320 (33%)
12-<16	6	60	30	65	70	69	294 (30%)
Total		147(15%)	98 (10%)	196 (20%)	294 (30%)	245 (25%)	980 (100%)

Cause- Number of pupils who had knowledge of the cause of HIV/AIDS; MOT- Number of pupils who had knowledge of the mode of transmission; CLIN- Number of pupils who had knowledge of the clinical presentation; Cure- Number of pupils who had knowledge that there is no cure; Contra- Number of pupils who had knowledge of prevention and control.

4. Discussion

The study was carried out among primary school pupils in Otukpo area of Benue State. It revealed that a good number of primary school pupils (49%) had been informed about HIV infection and AIDS. It is a good marker that the awareness of the disease had reached primary school level. This may be as a result of the massive enlightenment program organized by Department for International Development (DFID) in conjunction with the Benue State government.

About 35% of the pupils learnt of the disease from their parents. 3% of the children lost their parents because of HIV/AIDS. This mode of educating the children on HIV/AIDS is very helpful and makes the children know about the disease very early. This also formed the main source of information among the Nepals and Tanzanians^[2,5-9].

53% of the children got the information about the disease from their churches in their localities. That is a good medium of impacting the knowledge of HIV and AIDS on the public as people tend to believe more on their priests and pastors^[10].

It was quite commendable that almost all the respondents were

well versed with the fact that sexual intercourse was the main mode of transmission of the disease (HIV)^[11]. Misconceptions noted among the pupils about HIV/AIDS were that people affected by the disease must come down with wasting of their bodies and that unorthodox and spiritualists could cure the disease. Misconceptions have to be addressed by organized health education and information so that these children do not grow and pass on wrong notions about HIV/AIDS.

The children noted that abstinence is the best mode of prevention^[12]. Majority of them felt there should be no sexual intercourse outside marriage. Many of them did not know about the use of condom.

As expected, those in the higher classes (primary 4-6) are more aware of the disease. That is because they were more exposed than the junior classes. There were no significant sex differences in knowledge of the disease.

It cannot be overemphasized the need for education about HIV/AIDS to all cadres of children in primary schools. Health education interventions will impact positively in bridging the knowledge gap and acquiring the requisite attitude to the HIV/AIDS pandemics^[13].

It is recommended, therefore that HIV/AIDS education be included in the curriculum of primary schools.

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