

Counselling and Innovative Literacy Approaches as Strategies for Preventing STDS and HIV/AIDS Incidence among Persons with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT Poor parenting, lack of special care, poverty of the parents and poor social-economic background have pushed females with hearing impairment in urban centers to develop psychological problem. This in turn has prompted them to engage in illicit commercial sexual dealings within their neighbourhood, hotels, learning institutions, in a bid to make ends meet. The result of this act, more often than not, has exposed them to contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and the risk of HIV/AIDS infection. This paper thus investigated the factors resident in the family, the school, government, parental sources, peers and media that have prompted the females into illicit sexual acts. Thus, counselling and innovative literacy approaches are suggested as panacea for the creation of information and awareness as measures to combat the menace and scourge among the victims.

INTRODUCTION

Report of the Federal Ministry of Health, Lambo (2005) revealed that only 10 percent of Nigerians are aware of information on causative factors of HIV/AIDS. This implies that the huge expenditure of the Federal Government on the reduction of HIV/AIDS infection among the populace has not been fully justified. Evidence also revealed that poverty, low income of parents, retrenchment of workers who are invariably parents themselves have consistently made incomes insufficient for parents to provide for the needs of their female adolescents.

The influence of the economic slump on the life of youths is contributing negatively to the development of youths. Thus they are exposed to immoral sex drive and anti-social behaviours that impact negatively on the moral standards of the society. For example, female youngsters have taken to prostitution as a means of getting extra funds to meet their urgent and pressing needs. Though most of them enjoy the money but the resultant STD's and HIV/AIDS infection has been traumatic on the victims. This is evident in the interview of few female adolescents who were respondents in this study. While most of them have been lured into illicit sexual habits, the adolescents in return have induced their 'clients' into sexual acts through the wearing of appealing dresses, body hugs, tight jeans, miniskirts and show-your-back blouses.

At times, the female escapade is enhanced by drugs and alcohol which serve as ego or a catalyst to enhancing patronage of the commercial sex business. The Awake (1998) opined that the Western movies, magazines, pornographic (blue) films and pictures reviewed through computer browsing have usually aided youths engaging in illicit sex.

Poor parenting, and gross parental deprivation of functional and essential needs and attention, according to Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1981) have been identified as prompting the development of deviant behaviours among youth with disabilities. In fact, Ipaye (1996) observed that parents in Africa and especially Nigeria consider the disability and mental ability of their children before investing on their training and education, hence such unfortunate disabled youth suffer denial and miss chances of education to other able-bodied children in the family, thus they remain untrained. Such untrained hearing-impaired female in such families with attractive physique may resort to commercial sex-networked prostitution as a means of getting what they lack and seriously want to make ends meet. Mba (1981) lamented that poverty has spurred frustration and erratic thinking in persons with disabilities. This situation has induced females with hearing-impairment to consider commercial sex networking business as a viable option for survival.

On the other hand, Delano and Faoye (2000) and Richie-Adewusi (2000) noted that peer influence, lack of proper counseling on reproductive health education, exposure to Western video and Blue films, living in slum and poor environmental conditions have encouraged early initiation of youths, especially the hearing impaired - females to early sexual escapades. Further, pressure from the opposite sex and male adults taking advantage of the naivety of female youth play a major role in their immature exposure to illicit sexual practices for survival.

Over the years government has mounted mass literacy programmes supported by NGOs such as UNICEF, USAID, UNFOA and NACA. They have developed varieties of counseling, literacy messages and advocacy programmes to focus on able-bodied persons with little of such programmes on the hearing-impaired females on television (using sign language interpreters) and for visually-impaired (using Braille materials). Also, there are no special primers or literacy materials in adult education for the literacy training of adults with disabilities on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases in Nigeria. Rather efforts have been concentrated on care for the able-bodied persons.

This scenario poses a, serious concern to the present authors and has necessitated the study to engender innovative approaches in counseling and literacy training to reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhoea, syphilis and HIV/AIDS among persons with disabilities, especially female with hearing impairment.

Counseling, according to Olayinka, Achebe and Uba (1987), is aimed at making an individual know his/her society, understand himself/herself, take wise decisions on issues such as career, peer relationship, reproduction/sex, health and environmental living to ensure functional and lively existence free of health hazards. Thus counselling to persons with special needs, using therapeutic devices, methods and psychometrical analysis could help to unveil numerous and multiple covert and overt problems of persons with hearing-disabilities, some of which have hitherto, not been addressed due to insufficient professionals to help in the diagnosis and identification of these problems. Counseling thus, becomes an essential tool in the age of HIV/AIDS scourge, ravaging the life of man in the twenty-first century. In fact,

Danesy (2000) saw the importance of counseling services to persons with disabilities, when he listed the following benefits of effective counseling:

- educating them on many societal issues that may pose health hazards and dangers to their lives;
- making them take sharp and wise decisions about their career and personal living through counselling assistance of a professional counselor or social worker;
- enabling them to maintain high level of personal hygiene;
- establishing and maintaining good peer relationship by careful scrutiny of peers;
- assisting in inculcating basic life survival skills that would enhance their positive adjustment in the society;
- assisting in proper placement and enhancement of referral services to experts, who may help in resolving personal, health and social problems;
- enhancing positive capacity building; and
- providing avenue for analysis and explanation of data collected.

Thus, effective application of counselling strategies flavoured with innovative literacy approach and strategies would go a long way in creating prompt awareness among females with hearing impairment about health, reproductive and sexually transmitted diseases ravaging mankind. This could as such halt or stem the tide of STDs and HIV/AIDS among them.

The above suggests that children and adults with special needs require specialized counselling services to sustain them in the society. Such counseling strategies needed include:

- Individualized counseling services for training targeted females in commercial sex business, in reproductive health skills
- Group counseling aimed at counselling groups of targeted female prostitutes and sex workers on health protection.
- Preventive counseling and community counseling, using campaign programmes and sign language interpreters, social workers, counselors, special educators to reach persons with hearing impairment.
- Handbills, tracts and colour souvenirs should be produced in clear languages (using Nigeria's major local languages) to pass across advocacy messages for persons with special needs so that they can imbibe the habits of safe sexual relationship.

- The GSM service providers and other modern electronic communication outfits such as, MTN, M-TEL, V-Mobile, Globalcom and Odu'aTell should be sensitized to sponsor awareness programmes on sex and reproductive health schemes to reach literate persons with disabilities. This could be done through GSM text and e-mail messages on sex/reproductive health information, to acquaint them with information about HIV/AIDS and STDs. Counseling tips and ways of preventing the various associated diseases could be part of the messages.
- The recent global method of enlightenment by privileged persons with disabilities, according to Okediran and Danesy (2004), is through the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the use of computer technology. These help in providing current global health management intervention on STDs, STIs, HIV/AIDS to persons with special needs. However, browsing the Internet and Websites of many overseas, NGOs, INGOs, health organizations, UNESCO, UNICEF and so on, who have carried out experiments, researches and findings on STDs, STIs, HIV/AIDS could be benefiting to all and sundry.
- Aderinoye (1997) recommends one-counsel-one approach to transmitting vital information in society. This would enhance effective change within families and communities, if all literate persons could regard this drive as a mandatory task for saving their neighbours.

USE OF LITERACY ADVOCACY

Advocacy involves reaching significant targeted individuals in society, with hot information and messages capable of changing their illicit erratic, or negatively acquired behaviours. Advocacy messages secure the use of simplified methods in bringing the messages, in locally accepted manner or medium to reach the targeted audience. Therefore, advocacy materials to be developed and circulated to provide information to persons with disabilities will include the use of:

- Play-way and psycho-drama methods through stage drama and theatre display to show-case the following issues;
- ways through which HIV/AIDS and STDs

are contracted, transmitted and methods of prevention;

- dangers of drug abuse and self-medication;
- dangers of illicit sexual intercourse,
- effects of alcohol on human physiological system,
- dangers of multiple sexual relationship and partnership,
- dangers of having free sex without protection, for example, not using condom,
- advantage of abstaining from sex or 'zipping up'
- advantage of having a single sex partner,
- why they should know about family planning and reproductive health management.

Danesy and Busari (2005) observed that poor parenting has spurred many youths, especially those with hearing-impairment to sexual abuse in their various communities. Consequently, they emphasized and recommended responsive and responsible parenting for youths with disabilities to enable them live responsible and respected life in their communities.

Review of Innovative Literacy Approaches for Reducing Commercial Sex Network, HIV/AIDS, among Female Youth with Disabilities

Aderinoye (1998) recommended each one teach-one literacy teaching/training approach for teaching literacy skills. Hence each one teach-one method could thus be adopted to teach and counsel targeted female sex workers, young drug addicts and alcoholics. To enhance this, health personnel, family planners/reproductive health skill workers capable of disseminating informations safe sexual intercourse should be integrated into the school curriculum. Ministries of Education and Health should also support this approach by encouraging advocacy, the spirit and habit of "zipping up" or abstinence from sex.

The use of billboards and oil paintings carrying special inscriptions/messages against drug addiction, pornography, illicit sexual habits and sexy mode of dressing should be adopted to assist in educating persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the use of different Nigerian languages like Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Egun, Fulani, Fulfude, Kalabari/Ibibio and Efik and so on could be employed for writing conspicuous information and messages on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health and displayed to the public.

The use of electronic media (radio and television) could be adopted using sign interpreters

for the deaf in order to spread messages through talks, lectures, seminars, conferences and workshops to persons with hearing-impairment.

Community-related talk is a functional avenue that could be held at market places, motor parks, palace squares, large stadia and auditoria, schools halls, vocational / special institutions, where persons with disabilities are being rehabilitated. This avenue would assist in bringing HIV/AIDS messages to the doorstep of community members.

Notable and successful persons with special needs who have achieved and attained great heights in society could be invited to give community counseling and talks to encourage youth with special needs on issues like crime, HIV/AIDS, alcohol, sex and street hawking.

Staging practical demonstration of male and female condoms could be used; and the use of contraceptive pills flavoured and buttressed with the use of moving pictures / films, paintings on paper and handbills would be used. This however, could be flavoured by the use of mother tongue to drive home the messages.

Brailing in major languages according to Adebisi (2002) becomes a functional literacy method for teaching persons with visual impairment (blind) with literacy skills that would acquaint them with current relevant information, which may include reproductive health issues, social and human relations. Hence, it becomes imperative for government, National Councils on AIDS (NACA), USAID, AFRH, Ministry of Health and UNICEF to Braille advocacy and reproductive health materials for the blind to carry them along in the global drive at reducing HIV/AIDS and STDs.

Sign language and total communication methods are veritable strategies that could be adopted as a functional strategy for reaching the hearing-impaired. This implies that in every forum or special occasion sign language interpreters must be employed to interpret to the deaf, to keep them abreast of facts and information on HIV/AIDS.

Literacy primers should be developed by literacy experts in adult education to provide more avenues for adults and youth with disabilities to acquire relevant information in reproductive health issues. This is perceived to help them obtain prevention and reduction of the scourge of STDs, HIV/AIDS and other reproductive problems among youth with disabilities. This will also help in passing across

messages about the reality of HIV/AIDS to persons with special needs, thereby fighting and eradicating HIV/AIDS. The need for taking anti-retroviral drugs by HIV/AIDS patients should be emphasized; this can be achieved using moving vehicles and painted walls. The need for persons with disabilities to present themselves for screening, and retroviral tests should be encouraged in addition to accommodating and showing love to victims of HIV/AIDS by the society.

Peer counselling in developed countries has been used to target brilliant youth in life reproductive health / social skills, by using and training those who would in turn train and counsel their targeted peers in reproductive health skills capable of keeping them away from contracting HIV/AIDS or STDs.

Advocacy using tracts, books and coloured souvenirs could be of tremendous use for teenagers in places like schools, hospitals, vocational / rehabilitation centers, homes and so on for personal counseling of persons with disabilities.

Using professionals such as social workers, special and adult educators, counselors as facilitators or trainers of change agents is advocated. Also, priests in churches, Islamic preachers, parents, community leaders, opinion leaders and other stakeholders could be used as facilitators to hold talks with persons with special needs in their various communities or institutions.

Printing out innovative and advocacy messages capable of evoking functional health habits should be made available to persons with special needs to help in changing their negative habits.

Career and health talks using health experts such as doctors, public health workers and so on should be carried out among special need persons.

DISABILITIES, HIV/AIDS AND STDs INFECTION PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Danesy (2005) discovered in a study that persons with disabilities have covert impairments which have compounded their problems and functions, thus producing poor communication skills, and low level of information reception on social and health issues.

NACA (2005) confirmed the Minister of Health's assertion that only 10 percent of the Nigerian populace have sufficient information

on HIV/AIDS and STDs, thus majority take HIV/AIDS as a myth. It is pertinent therefore, to note that much information on the electronic media such as television and film, is not matched with effective sign language interpreting. Also, lack of Braille information on HIV/AIDS and STDs on leaflets, tracts and handbills for the visually impaired and persons with multiple disabilities has made them suffer untold hardships in getting current information.

Mba (1991) also lamented that poverty and lack of syndrome of persons with hearing-impairment have made it impossible for them to procure information gadgets and hearing aids to amplify sounds or collect update information.

Faoye and Adewusi (2000) recognized that the reason for early initiation of female youths into sex is a result of poor parenting, neglect and apathy within the family against children with disabilities. This was confirmed by Ipaye (1996); in a statement that parents consider the mental ability of their children before investing on them. All these have made it difficult for the proper education and training of female students with disabilities in Nigeria. Consequently, they roam their neighbourhood, motor garages, hawk in market places where they are prone to being victims of rape.

Though, the recent introduction of GSM mobile phoning system with the use of text messages and e-mail methods of transmitting information in society could be used by organizations like USAID, NACA and so on, to transmit HIV/AIDS information, the high cost of GSM phones and its servicing have not helped the situation for the disabled.

Lack of indepth knowledge of persons with disabilities in sign language and total communication skills on effective collection encoding or decoding of information has created more problems, while inflation and devaluation of the naira against foreign currencies such as the dollar and the pound sterling, have heightened the cost of hearing aids.

Wrong perception on the concept of HIV/AIDS by persons with disabilities has revealed that they see it as a myth and its reality not yet accepted. This is because existing pictures, films and literature are focused on the able bodied persons. By so doing, persons with disabilities feel that HIV/AIDS and STDs are health problems peculiar to the able-bodied persons only, moreso that government has not mounted

the HIV/AIDS test, specifically for persons with disabilities.

The writers found in a study at the Federal College of Education (FCE) (Special) Oyo in the response of 160 hearing impaired students secretive nature of persons with special needs and their hallow-effect syndrome for not wanting to open up or unveil their problems freely to able-bodied persons or counselors, until the situation/case becomes critical and unbearable, posing serious problem and restriction to their effective and sound functioning.

Adedoja (2000) observed that lack of sufficient information and continuous dependence on foreign information pose serious problem to direct collection of information from the source to disability studies and to disabled persons.

Health agencies, local and international organizations have been observed to handle and more strongly focused on able-bodied persons as regards HIV/AIDS and STDs, thereby leaving out persons with disabilities. This has kept many of the latter in the dark about the HIV/AIDS scourge.

COUNSELLING TIPS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR REDUCING STD AND HIV / AIDS AMONG THE HEARING IMPAIRED

To forestall, prevent and reduce the spread of the menace of STDs and HIV/AIDS among persons with special needs in Nigeria, especially the hearing - impaired and physically challenged persons, the following measures are recommended:

- USAID, UNICEF, WHO, NACA and so on should commence advocacy and awareness programme by mounting specialized programmes or projects using innovative literacy approaches, coupled with functional counselling, to educate persons with disabilities on means of contraction, spread and prevention of HIV/AIDS, STDs and reproductive health issues.
- Developing Braille materials on HIV/AIDS and STDs for persons with visual-impairment (on handbills, tracts, magazines and so on) should start immediately
- Using innovative methods such as cartoons, posters, billboards, literacy primer and readable pictures, video clips, TV

- advertises and radio broadcasting programmes to reach the physically challenged.
- Creating awareness and advocacy programmes and conducting facility visit for the disabled on HIV/AIDS and STDs and for the infected persons to see the reality of the case. They should be counseled on the need to undergo retroviral test to detect and determine their HIV/AIDS status.
 - Commencing simultaneous sign language interpreting on TV programmes alongside newscasting or programme presentation, and during public lectures to facilitate effective and correct transmission of messages should be given attention.
 - Reproductive health and sex education should be made an integral part of special need education curriculum for teaching various contraceptive and safe sex and protective skills
 - Existing tutors of special institutions should be re-trained on current methods of modern reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and STDs control measures, while Government should sponsor special advocacy programmes, seminars, conferences and workshops on HIV/AIDS for people with special needs and trainers.
 - More counselors, social and health workers should be recruited in special institutions to strengthen advocacy work on reproductive health.
 - Anyanwu (1997) recommended adult education and functional literacy programmes as effective means of creating awareness to people in the community, on important projects such as illiteracy, HIV / AIDS, this should be revisited.
 - Oyedeji, Omolewa and Asiedu (1984) affirmed to the usefulness of literacy programmes, as an effective strategy for creating awareness of community programmes in bringing about changes in the life of individuals in the society. This should be explored further.
 - Generally, parents should be counseled to take the education of their children with special needs as equally important as that of their able-bodied children, without apathy or discrimination. More female children with disabilities should be specially supported and assisted to acquire basic academic and vocational skills that will make them self-independent, rather than being coerced into

sex networking business.

- Special schools should be well funded by the three-tiers of government in Nigeria and equipped with functionally adapted tools that will enhance inclusive learning providing effective counseling and social work services which will facilitate all round growth and development of persons with disabilities.

From the above, functional literacy programmes, counseling flavoured with the use of advocacy materials and innovative methods such as primer, brailled materials, posters, pictorial illustrations, campaigns, community relation programmes, enlightenment programmes on STDs and HIV/AIDS among people with special needs, especially the female youths, there would be an enhanced prevention against the spread of HIV/AIDS and STDs among persons with special needs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, using tested psychological invention with retroviral tests, involving social workers and therapeutic health workers would scientifically assist in the quick spread of information and education on reproductive health. These methods would also help in detection of diseases on victims, and provide effective solution methods or treatments of the problem.

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