

Dissemination of HIV and AIDS Information to Students in Tertiary Institutions in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT Given the issue of the high prevalence of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) among youths, the study sought to investigate how HIV and AIDS information is disseminated to students at Mkoba Teachers College (MTC) in Zimbabwe. The researchers assumed that the high HIV prevalence among the youths may be attributed to a lack of adequate information on HIV and AIDS. Given this background, the researchers chose to target students in tertiary institutions because most of the active youths in Zimbabwe are absorbed there. According to past studies, the response of most tertiary institutions across Southern Africa to HIV and AIDS is passive. The survey descriptive research method was employed to conduct the study, whereby questionnaires were administered to twenty randomly selected students at the institution. Interviews were also conducted with two administrators, who were responsible for the Health and Life Skills department. It appeared that there were some HIV and AIDS programmes at MTC, mainly in the form of formal lectures and peer education programmes. It also seemed that most students acknowledge the need for HIV and AIDS information respectively. These include limited formats of information dissemination as well as lack of funding for information dissemination programmes. In order to counter these loopholes, it is recommended that MTC strengthens its partnerships with influential Non Governmental organisations (NGOs). The project gave referrals to NGOs which could assist the institution boost its HIV and AIDS information dissemination programme.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The sexual behaviour of some youth's in tertiary institutions is a major cause of concern in the light of the HIV and AIDS pandemic currently affecting the country. Zimbabwe is experiencing one of the world's most severe HIV and AIDS crises (Blair Research Institute 1996). More than half of those newly infected with HIV are between 15 and 24 years old, six thousand new infections each day occur in this group of 4 every minute according to United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF 2003). Working Groups in Higher Education (WGHE 2006) also notes "Tertiary institutions have numbers of young people in the age bracket of 19-25, who have been found to engage in risky sexually behaviour". Given the alarming statistics of the vulnerability of the youth to HIV and AIDS, the researchers wondered whether the tertiary institutions are doing enough to cater for the infor-

mation requirements of their youth population, the students.

Tertiary institutions offer ideal conditions for sexual networking and sexual mixing (Anarfi and Awusabo 2000). These institutions absorb many youths in the country and they tend to be a focal point in the lives of many youths. Despite this fact, however, it was observed that students still indulged in risky sexual behaviour. Given the fact that MTC is located within the researchers' home neighbourhood, the researchers noticed that it is common for the students to be involved in multiple concurrent partnerships (MCPs). Both male and female students are capable of having more than one sexual partner. Some female students may typically be involved in transactional relationships with an older man or "sugar daddy" that caters for her financial needs, and a younger 'serious' boyfriend (Jackson 2002). These students may be forced into such situations because of the need to acquire finances to cater for the high fees as well as other costs of living, which, given the harsh economic climate, are beyond the reach of many ordinary Zimbabweans. It is, however, difficult for the female student to negotiate for safer sex, especially with the older partner, as he has con-

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trol in the relationship by supplying her material needs.

The male students may also tend to be sexually involved with different partners because it is 'cool' for young men to have vast sexual experiences. Both the males and females, but more commonly male students indulge in risky sexual behaviour having partaken alcohol especially at club scenes and night functions where these young people feature to acquire entertainment according to WGHE (2006). Because of the time lag between HIV infection and the conversion to the life-threatening phase of AIDS, which may be at least 5-10 years, some tertiary students may become HIV infected before anyone becomes aware of it. Others may know their status but may still indulge in unprotected sex deliberately infecting their unsuspecting partners. Also, the atmosphere at campuses means that some students may be enjoying independence from the watchful eyes of their parents for the first time in their lives.

The critic Batambuze (2003) observes that "Creating avenues for young adults to access information and knowledge about HIV and AIDS is crucial at winning the war against humanities' worst crisis of the modern world." These avenues can ideally be created to tertiary institutions where some youths within the identified most susceptible age range spend most of their time. In the absence of a cure, information is one of the most important weapons that can be used to conquer the disease (Dube 2004)

As stated by Dube and Ocholla (2004), "Institutions of higher learning have the responsibility not only to fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic but also to take a prominent leadership position." As one of the major socializing forces in society, tertiary institutions thus have a grave obligation to educate the young adults on this matter through knowledge provisions, awareness fostering and promoting life-asserting attitudes (Kelly 2000). It is against this background that the researchers' curiosity was spurred to undertake the research. In the mind of the researchers, the careless sexual behaviour of youths in tertiary institutions may be attributed to the absence of adequate information of HIV and AIDS. If the information was available, as is the case at MTC, the researchers sought to identify loopholes in the delivery of the information, and other factors that resulted in continued careless sexual behaviour.

Contextually, the problem of HIV and AIDS is socio-economic. This view has also been supported by such critics as Otaala (2000), Chetty (2003) and WGHE (2006). In addition to human suffering and loss of life, AIDS in Africa is reversing development and socio-economic gains according to Meyer (2003). If not corrected, the crippling socio-economic impacts of the HIV pandemic will continue to sweep across the nation, with the most productive age group succumbing to AIDS.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive research methodology. The study concentrated on the qualitative form since this research aimed at elucidating what the participants had to say with regard to decision-making in their natural settings. In this regard, it was imperative that a methodological perspective be adopted to allow the findings to develop "from the data itself rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed" (Creswell 2002). The problem identified in this study demanded that the participants themselves be allowed to freely express their feelings, views and opinions. To this end Ely (1991:4) provides the following definition "...qualitative implies a direct concern with feelings, experiences and views as lived or felt or undergone..." This study adopted a case-study research design. A case study is described as a form of descriptor research that gathers a large amount of information about one or a few participants and thus investigates a few cases in considerable depth (Thomas and Nelson 2001). Questionnaires were administered to twenty randomly selected students at Mkoba Teachers College. Interviews were also conducted with two administrators, who were responsible for the Health and Life Skills department

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that 60% of the respondents were female whilst 40% were male students. 65% of these respondents were in the 19 – 25 age range. Of these, 40% were female and 25% were males. This is in line with what the literature review states that tertiary institutions are home

to most youths within the 19 – 25 age groups. These individuals therefore need to be exposed to more HIV and AIDS information, since they are the most vulnerable group. A total of 35% of the other respondents were more than 25 years of age.

Table 1: Gender and age distribution (N = 20)

Age group	Gender %		Total %
	Female	Male	
Less than 19	0	0	0
19 – 25	40	25	65
More than 25	20	15	35
Total	60	40	100

Table 2: Gender and source of income (N = 20)

Age group	Gender %		Total %
	Female	Male	
Family	60	30	90
Boyfriend or girlfriend	0	0	0
Other	0	10	10
Total	60	40	100

Data in Table 2 shows that 90% of students claimed to receive financial support from their families while they were at college. All the female respondents (60%) totally relied on their families for sustenance. Thirty percent of males also received financial support from their families, while 10% stated that they were self reliant as they were entrepreneurs. None of the respondents stated that their source of income was either a boyfriend or girlfriend. This is contrary to what the literature review states that college students may fall at the mercy of rich men or women at college, who may fulfil their financial requirements in exchange for sexual favours. Students in such situations increase their chances of acquiring HIV and AIDS and would therefore require information on the dangers of such relationships.

Table 3: Gender and risk perceptions (N = 20)

Gender	HIV risk	Not at risk	Total
Male	25%	15%	40%
Female	35%	25%	60%
Total	60%	40%	100%

On the respondents (Table 3), 35% of female students and 25% of male students viewed themselves at risk of HIV infection. However, 25% of female students and 15% of male students viewed themselves as not at risk of HIV infection. Broadly stated, a total of 60% of students viewed themselves at risk, whilst 40% said they were not at risk.

Table 4: Students who know their HIV status

Number of students	Age group			Total
	19	19-25	25+	
Yes	0	45	25	70
No	0	20	10	30
Have no intentions of doing so	0	0	0	0
Total	0	65	35	100

The results in Table 4 reflect that 45% of those aged between 18-25 have been tested for HIV and AIDS and are aware of their status. In this age group, 29% however, have not yet been tested. In the same vein, 25% of those aged 25years of age have been tested and only 10% have not.

HIV and AIDS Programmes at MTC

Both students and administrators were questioned about their opinions on the HIV and AIDS programmes at MTC. Table 5 shows are their responses:-

Table 5: Student knowledge of MTC HIV and AIDS programme (N=20)

Aware	Not aware	Total
95%	5%	100%

Table 5 reflects that the majority of students, 95% acknowledge that they know of the presence of the knowledge of HIV and AIDS programmes at MTC. A small minority group of students, 5% state that they are not aware of the presence of an HIV and AIDS programme at MTC. This may show that the institution has an active HIV and AIDS programme, since many students are aware of the presence of a programme.

Table 6: Student opinions on the HIV and AIDS programme (N=20)

<i>Very effective</i>	<i>Fairly good</i>	<i>More programmes needed</i>	<i>Not effective</i>	<i>Total</i>
5%	60%	25%	10%	100%

Sixty percent of the students agree that MTC has a fairly good HIV and AIDS programme. 25% of the students state that more programmes are needed to facilitate behaviour change (Table 6). Ten percent of the respondents say that the programmes are not effective at all while 5% view the programme as very effective

Table 7: Student perceptions on whether HIV and AIDS is considered a serious problem (N = 20)

<i>Serious problem</i>	<i>Not serious</i>	<i>Total</i>
65%	35%	100%

The statistics reflect that more students, 65%, agree that HIV is considered a serious problem within their institution according to Table 7. Another 35% counter this, saying that HIV and AIDS are not considered a serious problem in the institution. This seems to suggest that there is room for the institution to do more in terms of HIV and AIDS information dissemination.

Table 8: Administrator ratings of HIV and AIDS programme (N=2)

<i>Administrator Ratings</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
High priority	0	0
Moderate priority	2	100
Low priority	0	0
Totals	2	100

Table 8 shows that both administrators, 100% seem to agree that HIV and AIDS programmes are given moderate priority at MTC. They seem to share the same view with the students in terms of how the programme at MTC is weighted. This seems to indicate that there is room for the institution to invigorate HIV and AIDS information dissemination.

The findings on Table 9 show that 45% of the students at MTC view the HIV and AIDS programme as fair, 30% describe the programmes

as excellent, while 20% of the students say it is good. However, 5% of the students say the programme is poor. The results seem to further consolidate the recurrent theme that the institution can do more in as far as the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information is concerned.

Table 9: Student ratings of HIV and AIDS programme (N = 20)

<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Total</i>
30%	20%	45%	5%	100%

Presence of Funding for HIV and AIDS Programmes

Both administrators (100%) agreed that there were funds specifically allocated to the provision of HIV and AIDS information at MTC. This may indicate that even though there is policy for the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information at the institution, information dissemination may be weakened because there is no funding to pursue some programmes. Administrators however reiterated the fact that the institution relies on NGOs, such as the MASO (Midlands Aids Service Organisation), for the financial support of HIV and AIDS activities such as workshops.

Presence of a Systematic Policy on HIV and AIDS

Both administrators agreed that there was a systematic policy towards the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information at MTC. This may reflect that the institution considers HIV and AIDS a serious issue since they have a systematic procedure in place to facilitate information provision.

Relevance and Design Of HIV and AIDS Programmes at MTC

Table 10 shows that 86% of the respondents agree that there are peer educators at MTC while 77% of these respondents are students and 9% are administrators. On the other hand, 5% of the respondents said they did not know of the presence of peer educators at MTC. Another 9% of the respondents said they were not sure of the presence of peer educators at MTC. This may reflect the presence of an active HIV programme

at MTC, since most students are aware of the presence of peer educators at the institution. The administrators agreed to the presence of peer educators at MTC. They further explained that these educators were very useful in bringing the shortage of staff within the Health and Life Skills Department. Students were also said to be more comfortable in dealing with them.

Table 10: Presence of peer educators at MTC

Presence of peer educators at MTC	Respondents %		
	Students	Administrators	Total %
Yes	77	9	86
No	5	0	5
Not sure	9	0	9
Total	91	9	100

Table 11: Student opinions on MTC peer educators (=20)

Need more information	Necessary	More students to be trained	No need of Educators	Educators not knowledgeable	Total
30%	25%	20%	15%	10%	100%

The findings displayed on Table 11 show that 30% of the students believed that peer educators should be given more information to deal with them better whilst 25% stated that indeed they are necessary because they understand them better. In the same vein, 20% stated that more students should be trained as peer educators while 15% of the students said that they do not see the need of peer educators, as they really have no impact. On the contrary, 10% stated that peer educators were not knowledgeable enough to counsel others. None of the students, 0% had views other than the above stated. The findings seem to reflect that peer educators are a huge element in the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information at MTC. However,

it appears they need more help to perform this function more effectively.

Roles of Peer Educators at MTC as Expressed by the Administrators

Both administrators agreed that the roles of the peer educators are to educate and share on issues concerning HIV and AIDS with other students. This is done by conducting awareness campaigns. This indicates that peer educators at MTC are performing their expected roles, as these are some of their expected roles and responsibilities.

Table 12: Frequency of feelings on the adequacy of the HIV and AIDS information in terms of content and depth

Feelings on the adequacy of information	Respondents %		
	Students	Administrator	Total %
Yes	72	5	77
No	18	5	23
Total	90	10	100

Seventy- seven percent of the responses from both the students and administrators stated that they found HIV and AIDS information adequate to students in term of content and depth. However, 23% of the respondents said they did not find the HIV and AIDS information adequate as reflected in Table 12. One administrator thought that the HIV and AIDS programme at MTC was adequate whilst the other thought otherwise. These conflicting views emphasise the fact that there is room for more of the programme to be improved.

Table 13 shows that forty- one percent of the respondents said that they felt the information was adequate in terms of content and depth because informative lectures were held regularly. Respondents seem to base the adequacy on the frequency of lectures. According to 5%, the programme is adequate because relevant sup-

Table. 13: Reasons for the feelings on the adequacy of HIV and AIDS information

Informative lecturers held	Changes in student sexual behaviour	Real life experiences shared	Too narrow formats	Indulge in risky behaviour	No field trips	Availability of reading material	Total
41%	10%	10%	11%	18%	5%	5%	100%

porting material is available through the library. On the other hand, 10% said that they are adequate because real life experiences are shared while 18% said that they do not feel that the information is adequate because students still indulge in risky sexual behaviour. Another 10% said that the formats of information provision were too narrow whilst 5% said that the programme was inadequate because there were no field trips to support theoretical work. These findings seem to suggest that the institution still has more to do to satisfy some of its recipients.

Table 14: HIV and AIDS information at MTC (N=20)

Formal lectures	Peer Education	Seminars	Other sources	Total
40%	45%	10	5%	100%

Table 14 illustrates that 45% rely on peer education programmes for the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information. Following closely, 40% state that they rely on formal lectures. However, 10% say that they rely on seminars and NGO activities, while 5% say they rely on other sources. These are personal radios and television sets which students may bring to the campus. This may indicate the presence of a fairly relevant HIV and AIDS programme at the institution in as far as the peer education is concerned because some students seem to rely on these key individuals for HIV and AIDS information provision.

Challenges in Disseminating and Acquiring HIV and AIDS Information at MTC

Table 15: Students face challenges of students in acquiring HIV and AIDS information

Yes	No	Total
15%	85%	100%

Table 15 shows that 85% of the students stated that they do not encounter any challenges in acquiring HIV and AIDS information from the institution. This may indicate a slight discrepancy in the information provision at MTC. However, 15% of students stated they faced challenges in acquiring HIV and AIDS information. It seems that the challenges cited all have to do

with the actual information materials. This may indicate a problem of shortage of diversity of information formats to disseminate HIV and AIDS information.

Table 16: Challenges faced by administrators in disseminating HIV and AIDS information to students

Funding	Course taken for granted	Transport challenges	Inadequate lecturing staff	Poor internet connectivity	No support structures	Total
14%	30%	14%	14%	14%	14%	100%

It appears from the results in Table 16 that both administrators bemoaned the fact that they faced challenges in the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information. The greatest challenge, 30%, facing administrators is that there are some lecturers and students who may take the course on Health and Life Skills for granted. On the hand, 14% of the administrators said they faced the problem of funding for materials. Another 14% said they did not have transport to follow up students on attachment. A further 14% in each instance cited poor Internet connectivity, and another 14% brought out the problem of no support structures for HIV positive students. These challenges seem to hamper the effective dissemination of HIV and AIDS information at the MTC.

Table 17: Suggested solutions to problems in HIV and AIDS information acquisition and dissemination

Suggested solution	Responses %		
	Students	Administrators	Totals
Allocate funds for HIV and AIDS programmes	5	9	14
Recruit more staff for lecturing the course	0	9	9
Partner with more NGOs to acquire funding	23	9	32
Include audio –visual materials such as videos and DVDs	26	9	35
Invigorate peer education training programmes	5	5	10
Total	59	41	100

Table 17 shows that the greater majority of the respondents 35% seem to agree that the inclusion of more formats of HIV and AIDS information dissemination, such as videos and DVDs, will go a long way in solving the issue of material shortage. Following closely is the 32% of respondents who state that MTC should partner with more NGOs to acquire funding for reading and materials on HIV and AIDS. In the same vein, 14% of the respondents think that the institution should allocate funds for HIV and AIDS information dissemination while 9% state that more staff should be recruited for lecturing the course since the administrators highlighted they are few. If implemented, some of these solutions offered by respondents may go a long way in solving the discrepancies that are currently faced in the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information at MTC.

DISCUSSION

Student Need for HIV and AIDS Information

More students acknowledge that they are at risk of HIV and AIDS infection. This admittance may show that students need HIV and AIDS information which will help them to reduce this risk. Also none of the students reported that they received financial support from their boyfriends or girlfriends. This finding is contrary to what Meyer (2005) and Anarfi and Awusabo (2000) observe in the literature review state that some students indulge in transactional relationships, which may expose them to greater risk of HIV. The fact that students at MTC do not do this may indicate the presence of an effectual HIV and AIDS programme at MTC, as students do not indulge in this high risk behaviour. This assumption is further strengthened by the fact that the greater majority of the sampled students have been tested and are aware of their HIV status.

Existing HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Programmes at MTC

The research findings largely support the fact that there are some HIV and AIDS information dissemination programmes at MTC. This finding is somewhat contrary to what critics such as Kelly and Cailloids (2007) and Crewe (2000) observed in their studies that there is silence at institutional level about HIV and AIDS issues,

as students are very much aware of the programmes at MTC. The extent of the programmes at MTC comprises formal oral lectures, peer education programmes and workshops organised by NGOs. The presence of NGO activity at MTC also seems to be complementary to the programmes the institution already has in place, rather than expecting NGOs to take centre stage and be dominant in the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information. This fact is also contradictory to what Otaala (2000), states in the literature review that most responses of tertiary institutions are donor driven.

Formats of HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination at MTC

Both students and administrators contend that the most common format of information provision is through oral lectures, followed by through books, brochures and newsletters respectively. The findings seem to reflect a gap in the formats in which HIV and AIDS information is disseminated to students at MTC. There is a total absence of audio – visual materials, such as videos and DVDs which may also prove effectual as they appeal to more senses, compared to the printed and oral formats when applied independently. The Internet is also not being manipulated to transmit or acquire HIV and AIDS information, yet it may also be a good platform for networking with other organisations and sourcing current materials. The absence of audio – visual materials at MTC may be due to poor funding, as these materials are relatively more expensive to acquire and maintain, as compared to their print counter parts.

It seems most students rely on oral lectures to receive HIV and AIDS information. This method, as a dominant source of information is castigated by Jackson (2002) who states that a didactic one – way form of information delivery is highly informative, but is unlikely to change attitudes or sexual behaviours of youth. This becomes disturbing since most youths claim to depend so much on formal lectures for the acquisition of HIV and AIDS information at MTC.

Relevance and Design of the HIV and AIDS Programmes at MTC

Mudarikiri and Ndlovu (2008) postulates that a relevant and well designed HIV and AIDS institutional programme is that which includes

those concerned, the students, and inculcates in them a spirit of part ownership of the programme. The presence of peer educators at MTC is apparent, and many students also acknowledge the fact that they rely on these key individuals for the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information. Whilst this is so, it also came out that most students believe that peer educators needed more information on HIV and AIDS so that they could perform their roles more effectively.

Challenges Faced in Acquiring and Disseminating HIV and AIDS Information

More students revealed that they did not encounter any problems in the acquisition of HIV and AIDS information at the institution. The major challenges highlighted by students are that HIV and AIDS information is not readily available, as well as the shortage of information resources. The shortage of materials was also alluded to by the administrators of the HIV and AIDS programme at MTC. Administrators also pointed out the lack of seriousness towards the subject exhibited by both the lectures and the students. This may be caused by the fact that HIV and AIDS is a widely talked about subject in other spheres such as the media. Students may also have been lectured on the subject from primary school through to high school, preceding college studies. Students may therefore feel saturated with information and assume they know it all. Lectures, also, on the other hand also carry the same attitude, thinking they have nothing new to offer, since the subjects is widely publicised.

Funding was also another problem alluded to by the administrators. Dube and Ocholla (2004) recognise that this is one great challenge faced by many tertiary institutions. Despite the presence of an HIV and AIDS programme at MTC, the quality of the programme seems to be compromised since there is even no budget allocated to HIV and AIDS issues by the institution. The administrators also bemoaned the shortage of lecturing staff at MTC, with currently only two lecturers responsible for teaching the entire group of students at MTC. This high student to lecturer ratio may compromise the quality of HIV and AIDS information disseminated to students. It is difficult to imagine how only two lectures can handle an entire institu-

tion of students, ranging from Year 1 to Year 3. However, through further probing, it came out that peer educators do a great deal in assisting the lectures in this respect.

The administrators also revealed that they did not have adequate support structures for students who had tested HIV positive. This may be very dangerous, because after testing positive for HIV, what then becomes of that student? They will still need more information about the conditions and how to live positively. Transport challenges were also alluded to, to follow up students on industrial attachment. These students may be far away from the campus, but they still need HIV and AIDS information regularly so that they do not lose focus.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the data was first presented using a variety of pictorial presentations such as pie charts, bar graphs, two – way contingency tables and simple tables where appropriate. In some cases, simple verbal descriptions were used. Having described the data being presented, the researchers proceeded to insert either a table, bar graph or pie chart where deemed necessary. These complemented the verbal descriptions. A section showing the response rate of 100% and how this large response rate was accomplished was included. The researchers also showed the gender distribution of the respondents, which showed that there were more female than male respondents. Data was also presented to support the fact that students at MTC realise and acknowledge that they need information on HIV and AIDS. The second stage displayed data showing whether there are programmes on HIV and AIDS at MTC, and also determining the extent of the programme, from the view of both students and administrators. It appears that MTC has an active HIV and AIDS programme. Data showing the formats available for information dissemination at MTC was also presented. It seems apparent that the college does not exploit electronic information resources as well as audio visual materials. There is also a tendency by students to rely on formal lectures for HIV and AIDS information. The study also showed whether the HIV programme is relevant and well designed. The programme proved to be somewhat inclusive of the student population, through peer educators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the institution diversify the format of HIV and AIDS information dissemination, so as to have a more profound impact on students as this facilitates the provision of ultra current information which appeals to all senses. This may be done through the use of videos, DVDs as well as the internet.

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