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## **Awareness of Public Library and Utilization of its HIV/AIDS Information Resources and Services by Secondary School Adolescents** (pp. 152-161)

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### **Abstract**

*Public libraries have become common ground for providing proactive prevention-focused AIDS information services. The aim of this study was to evaluate the awareness of presence of public libraries and utilization of their HIV/AIDS information resources and services by secondary school adolescents in two major cities of Osun state, Western Nigeria. Secondary school students were recruited from Osogbo and Ile-Ife and were asked through a paper questionnaire to respond to whether they were aware of the public library in their city; positive respondents were then implored to provide answers to enquiries about their utilization of AIDS information resources and services. 420 students participated in the study, 52.9% of them were aware of public library in their city; prevalently found among females, senior students and respondents from Osogbo. About half of the respondents who were aware of public libraries actually visited one before. Library based services were used more by the males while the females used more of the outreach services. This study revealed moderate awareness of public libraries*

*and low utilization of their AIDS information services. Librarians still have daunting work to do in Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Awareness, utilization, public libraries, students, adolescents.

### **Introduction**

HIV came to the fore in 1981 and has posed one the greatest health threats the world has ever known (Reeves, 2000) and virtually every country in the world has been affected by HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 1997). In Nigeria, an estimated 2.9 million [1.7 million–4.2 million] people were living with the virus in 2005 (UNAIDS, 2006). The epidemic shows considerable variation, with state-wide prevalence ranging from as high as 10% in Benue (in the North Central zone) and 8% in Akwa Ibom (South South zone) to under 2% in Ekiti, Oyo (both in the South West zone). Osun State is located between Oyo and Ondo State (Federal Ministry of Health Nigeria, 2006).

There is no vaccine or cure for HIV or AIDS; information, is therefore crucial for preventing the spread of the virus. As gatekeepers of information, libraries are in a central position in disseminating HIV/AIDS information because of their inherent potentials to meet the demands of HIV-AIDS preventive strategies. People see libraries as familiar and accessible and as a reliable source of information (Lancaster, 2003).

Although the Internet is making a great deal of health information widely available, not all of this information is reliable, accurate and unbiased. Public libraries are often the first point of access for individuals seeking consumer health information. Chobot (2003) in a report by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, wrote that most Americans are hungry for health information, and the place that many people go to find answers to their questions, and other health information is their local public library.

Public libraries have attempted to integrate HIV/AIDS educational information into their general services. Many public and school libraries have created HIV/AIDS “corners” that include mostly pamphlets and ephemeral materials. In the HIV/AIDS corners, children are introduced to materials about HIV/AIDS and are given the opportunity to talk about the disease through guided discussion with peers (Baffour-Awuah, 2004). Ghosh (2005) described e- learning as a cost effective way of spreading information across geographically dispersed centers. E-learning module on AIDS awareness

may be installed in Public libraries aimed at educating and increasing responsiveness within the community.

Awareness about HIV/AIDS in Nigeria has in recent years been increased through the activities of international agencies, government agencies ie. National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), non-governmental agencies (NGOs), media, faith-based institutions (Churches and Mosques), printed matters and billboards. Oyelude and Oti (2007) opined that lack of information appropriate to help in taking decisions on personal health matters - constitute a great barrier to fighting the scourge of HIV/AIDS. In their paper, they enumerated intervention programs in Nigeria to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases by 2015 in consonance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and went further to enumerate roles of libraries and librarians on HIV/AIDS information dissemination in Nigeria. Needless to say public libraries in recent times have become common ground for providing proactive prevention-focused information services, but there is no study in Nigeria sighted in the literature on this discuss.

### **Materials and Methods**

Osun state was one of the states in the south-western part of Nigeria. The National and the State libraries were situated in Osogbo (state Capital) while other public libraries were in the local government headquarters. The libraries were funded by the National, State and Local governments respectively. The clientele of these public libraries primarily come from the localities sitting them; therefore two towns that have functioning libraries (libraries that have librarians and library assistants) were selected; Osogbo sitting the state and the national libraries and Ile-Ife with a local government public library. Two secondary schools were randomly selected from each town from a list provided by the Ministry of Education (Source; Guidelines for admission into junior secondary schools and technical colleges 2005/2006 session, Ministry of Education Osun state) All the four schools provided education to students at all levels of Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) 1 to 3 and Senior Secondary schools (SSS) 1 to 3 with average enrollment of about 20 to 25 students.

From the six grades in each school, one class each was randomly selected with all the pupils present in class made to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from the School principals before the questionnaires

were administered. The school teachers did not participate in the study and were not allowed as research assistants.

The questionnaire was drawn based on the services offered by public libraries in Kenya, a developing African country (Kenya National Library Service, n.d.). The students were asked to respond to whether they were aware of the public library in their city. Those that gave positive responses were asked to proceed to the next part of the questionnaire that inquired about utilization of public library AIDS resources and services in their cities. Four hundred and thirty six copies of the questionnaire were administered which took about ten minutes to complete and all of them were retrieved immediately. Sixteen copies were not properly completed which rendered them inadequate for interpretation and therefore not included. The responses were taken to represent subjective answers of the students about their knowledge and utilization of the public library/libraries in their cities and were analyzed using SPSS for windows version 9.0 (SPSS Inc. Chicago Illinois, USA).

## **Results**

There were about 420 (male, 193; female, 227) respondents analysed in the study. 222 (52.9%) respondents knew about the presence of public library in their city. The distribution showed there were 109 (56.5%) males and 113 (49.8) females, 105 (57.4%) students from Osogbo and 117 (49.4%) from Ile-Ife, 107 (51%) junior secondary school students and the senior secondary school students were 115 (54.8%).

Table I showed that 52.3% (116) of those that knew about public library in their city actually visited one before with slightly more male respondents. The registered library users were 29.3% males and 20.4% females. The library-based HIV/AIDS information disseminating services were utilized more by the males, i.e., reading materials and publications on HIV/AIDS in the library (41%), borrowing of books, journals, newspapers etc on HIV/AIDS (27.5%), and more males respondents claimed to have been presented with preventive devices like condoms (28.4%). Females were found to utilize more of the field-based HIV/AIDS information dissemination services, i.e., reading materials on HIV/AIDS freely distributed to their school library (51.3%) and market centers (45.1%) and, watched drama, songs and dances on HIV/AIDS organized by the public library (58.4%). Also, a higher number of females claimed to have attended lectures on

HIV/AIDS (46.9%), get together (20.4%) and World AIDS day celebrations (23.9%).

With the exception of participants that have watched drama et cetera and read publications on HIV/AIDS, more than half of the respondents that visited the public library before never utilized its AIDS awareness resources and services.

Senior secondary school students, prevalently visited public library before (57.4%); possessed public library membership cards (27.8%) and prevalently utilize library and field-based HIV/AIDS information dissemination services.

Prevalent number of students from Osogbo has visited public library before, registered users and utilizes HIV/AIDS information awareness services.

### **Discussion**

Library and field-based HIV/AIDS information dissemination have recently been seen as powerful weapons in the fight against the scourge of HIV/AIDS largely because of globally acceptable services of libraries.

The results showed that about half of the total participants (52.9%) have heard about public library prior to this study; also, of the respondents that are aware of public libraries about half of them have visited one previously. These values were quite surprisingly poor in this age which talks more about the attractiveness of public libraries to adolescents even in other developing countries like Uganda and Kenya

The low patronage of public library in this environment might have partly arisen due to increasingly use of alternatives like internet services by adolescents and youths, who have overwhelmingly adopted the technology in Nigeria. In a study of the impact of Youth's Use of the Internet on the Public Library by George (2004), youths evaluated the service characteristics of the Internet more positively than they evaluated the service characteristics of the public library. The Internet as a means for socialization, education, information access, entertainment, shopping, and communication has been said to be increasing dramatically especially for adolescents with health concerns (Borzekowski & Rickert, 2001) with more than 80% of American youth using the Internet, and nearly half log on daily (Lenhart et al, 2005).

Other suggested bane of public library attractiveness to adolescents is the habit of reading in children which experiences a sudden regression when they reach this age group. This decline was as a result of changes in the interests and motivations of children/teenagers. A preference for being with friends and listening to music is indicative of young people's value systems and tastes at this stage of their lives: the search for their own identity and achieving their own framework of social relations (Blanes, 2005).

There is also the unfortunate perception that teens hold damaged view of public libraries on many fronts, according to a research cited by Fisher Heather, with over 30% of teens queried saying no suggested improvements would entice them into any public library (Fisher, 2003).

The percentage of male students that were aware of the presence of public library in their city and that have visited one before were slightly more than the females, this finding was contrary to the report of George (2004). We want to suggest that this might have probably due to the cultural practices in Nigeria where female adolescents and youth are normally engaged in domestic chores even at supposedly leisure times which might have prevented them from attending to other issues like seeking health information.

The presence of two public libraries in Osogbo and probable increased library activities in the state capital might explain the greater awareness of the presence of public library found among the respondents there.

It was not surprising to find more senior students having prior knowledge and visit to public libraries. It is the opinion of the authors that the public libraries are generally used by students to read for exams especially West African school Certificate examination mainly written by the final year secondary school grades. Also, the senior students may have used the libraries as hideout for reading, class work and fun.

It should be noted that a quarter of the total number of students that participated in the study actually visited a public library before and more than half of this number never used its AIDS resources and services. This observation was quite significant because it brings to the fore evidence of low utilization of public library HIV/AIDS information resources and services by the students. We strongly submitted that this may have been due

to available HIV/AIDS resources that were greatly unattractive to these adolescents. Such a submission was confirmed by Muswazi (2000), who conducted a survey of 14 public libraries in Swaziland on the availability of HIV/AIDS resources and found out that information resources were limited in terms of relevance, currency and volume. Hart (2005) identified other problems of African public libraries including South Africa. Budget cuts, and consequent reduction in services and lowered staff morale were predominant. This surely applies to Nigeria with annual unacceptable budgetary allocation to education ministry and its agencies by the government at all levels. Batambuze (2003) also said that libraries are yet to openly come out as important links in the chain for the dissemination of information and knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Anecdotally, Nigeria is not an exception.

More females used the services especially library outreach services than the boys, i.e., reading materials on HIV/AIDS freely distributed to their school library and market centers and, watched drama, songs and dances on HIV/AIDS organized by the public library. Also, a higher number of females claimed to have attended lectures on HIV/AIDS, get together and World AIDS day celebrations. It has been opined that regardless of location, women tend to be the primary seekers of health information for their children and other family members, as well as for themselves (Stoller, 1993; Wuest, 2000; Warner, 2004), and they represent the majority of health information seekers (Hibbard, 1999).

In view of a report by the UNAIDS (2004) in 2004 that HIV knowledge appears to be on the decline compared to young people surveyed in 1990, libraries in Osun state and in Nigeria as a whole need to be re-envisioned by librarians, apart from the traditional print-based culture, should break into the new digitized literacies which are quite attractive to adolescents and youth. They should contribute to the effectiveness of the campaign against HIV/AIDS in this age group by selective dissemination of HIV/AIDS information that target the habits, interests and needs of young people ie, novels of adventure, modern music, comics, games and sports, cinema and library internet services. Finally, we are suggesting that librarians should begin to carry out periodic school visits for impact assessment and active collaboration with school libraries for HIV/AIDS information propagation.

## **Conclusion**

Baring apparent limitation to this study, i.e., on-sight assessment of the libraries were not carried out which was not part of our objectives in the outset; the study revealed low awareness and utilization of public libraries in Osun state, a south-western state of Nigeria. Multi-state comparative surveys and case studies of public libraries HIV/AIDS information resources and services in the western part of Nigeria are future researches of the authors.

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Table I: Distribution according to gender of 222 participants that have heard about Public Library Before

S/N	Use of Library resources and materials	Male (%) n=109	Female (%) n=113	Never used the service (%)
1	Visited the public library before	59 (54.1)	57 (50.4)	106 (47.7)
2	Have a library card	32 (29.3)	23 (20.4)	167 (75.2)
3	Have borrowed books, journals, newspapers etc on HIV/AIDS in the library before	30 (27.5)	22 (19.5)	170 (76.6)
4	Have read publications on HIV/AIDS distributed by the public library in their school	54 (49.5)	58 (51.3)	110 (49.5)
5	Have read publications on HIV/AIDS freely distributed during exhibitions, lectures or symposia before.	60 (55.0)	62 (54.9)	100 (45.0)
6	Have read publications on HIV/AIDS freely distributed in market centers.	48 (44.0)	51 (45.1)	123 (55.4)
7	Have read publications on HIV/AIDS in the public library before	41 (37.6)	39 (34.5)	142 (64.0)
8	Have watched drama, songs and dances on HIV/AIDS organized by the public library	63 (57.8)	66 (58.4)	93 (41.9)
9	Have been to a get together organized by the town's library on HIV/AIDS awareness.	13 (11.9)	23 (20.4)	186 (83.8)
10	Have been to video shows on HIV/AIDS organized by the public library	43 (39.4)	30 (26.5)	149 (67.1)
11	Have attended lectures on HIV/AIDS organized by the public library	44 (40.4)	53 (46.9)	125 (56.3)
12	Have attended World AIDS day celebration organized by the public library	15 (13.8)	27 (23.9)	180 (81.1)
13	Have been presented with preventive devises like condoms by the public library before	31 (28.4)	9 (8.0)	182 (82.0)