

Influence of HIV/AIDS Media Campaign on Sex Workers in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study is an assessment of the influence of HIV/AIDS television campaigns on commercial sex workers in Awka metropolis. The study is anchored on the agenda setting theory. It adopted survey research method and used questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The population of the study is the 69 commercial sex workers in Amansea, Awka, Anambra State and the sample size chosen was 50 respondents drawn purposively. Findings show, among others, that commercial sex workers are aware of HIV/AIDS campaigns on the television and they do not see abstinence from sex as an effective HIV/AIDS control measure. Findings further show that respondents pay more attention to the use of condom campaign and that family problems and economic hardship are the major factors that lure youths to the illicit commercial sex business. Based on the findings, the paper recommends, among others, that government should tackle the rising problem of unemployment and other social problems that lead youths into the vain business.

Keywords: Assessment, Impact, HIV/AIDS, Television Campaigns, Commercial Sex Workers

Introduction

HIV/AIDS has become one of the most devastating diseases humanity has ever faced. It has become a major public health concern with about half of new infections occurring in young people (Durojaiye, 2011). Durojaiye (2011) further avers that sexual behaviour change remains the most effective way of preventing transmission. HIV/AIDS is a global pandemic which is ravaging the lives of many people. The disease affects the white and the black, the rich and the poor, the aged as well as the young, the educated and the illiterate. Indeed, all nations of the world are groaning under the excruciating burden of HIV/AIDS. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a disease of human immune system. It is caused by the human immune deficiency virus (HIV), which attacks the white blood cell and destroys the body's ability to fight infection.

HIV/AIDS started spreading extensively in the late 1970s and 1980s among men and women with multiple sexual partners in the East and Central Africa and among homosexual and bisexual men in the United States, Australia and Western Europe. Studies conducted by World Health Organisation (WHO) revealed that AIDS patients are characterised by depletion of white blood cell called T4 lymphocytes, which play a crucial role in coordinating the body's immune defense against invading organisms. It was presumed that this defect in AIDS patients was acquired in a common manner. Researchers have isolated HIV from a number of body fluids including blood, semen, saliva, tears, urine, cerebrospinal fluid, breast milk and vaginal secretions. Strong evidence indicates that HIV is transmitted only through three primary routes, namely:

- sexual intercourse, whether vaginal or anal, with an infected individual;
- exposure to infected blood or sharing of unsterilised skin-piercing instruments such as needles, syringes, surgical knives, etc; and
- from the infected mother to her child before or during birth.

The first case of AIDS was reported in Nigeria in 1986 and shortly after, it was reported that five percent of Nigeria population is infected with HIV, the agent which causes AIDS. In 2004 four million Nigerians were reported to be HIV positive (WHO report, 2004) and today over 28 percent of the nation's population live with HIV/AIDS, majority of them youths within 15 to 24 years (WHO Report, 2011). Till date, no permanent cure has been found for the pandemic, but drugs that can help those infected to live with the disease have been developed. Governments all over the world invest huge sums of money in a bid to control the disease. Several agencies, which focus attention on HIV/AIDS and what could be done to lessen its spread and pain on humanity have been put in place; notable among them are: the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) and Society for Family Health. The efforts of these agencies have been geared towards the control of the pandemic since total eradication is impossible, at least, for now.

The media generally have been at the centre stage and have played a central role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Organisations that are involved in the fight against the scourge use the print media; namely: newspapers, magazines and other printed materials as well as the electronic media of radio and television to ferret their messages to the people. Specifically, television has been used to advantage by

HIV/AIDS campaign planners in reaching out to the people particularly the most affected proportion of the population – the youths. Several television messages designed for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS abound, namely: the ABC message (Abstinence, being faithful to a partner and use of condom), the zip up campaign, which advocates that youths should zip up and stay away from casual sex (or sex before marriage), *AIDS no day show for face*, a pidgin English programme/ad intended to reach the youths particularly the uneducated, and “the spread the news, not the virus” media campaign, to name a few.

The main reason for the media campaign against HIV/AIDS is founded on the premise that since the disease cannot be eradicated, efforts should be made to discourage behaviours that could increase chances of infection and spread of the sickness. Risk factors that could guarantee greater chances of infection and spread have been identified to include: careless and casual sex with people whose HIV/AIDS status are unknown, as well as engaging in promiscuous life style. Unfortunately, the activities of sex workers (people who commercialise sex for selfish gain) appear to be on the increase, particularly in the cities and semi-urban areas of Nigeria. The number of sex workers seems to be increasing in the same or greater proportion to the efforts to combat the HIV/AIDS.

The Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV) which causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) principally attacks T-4 lymphocytes, a vital part of the human immune system. As a result, the body’s ability to resist opportunistic viral, bacterial, fungal, protozoa and other infection is greatly weakened. Neurological complications and drastic weight loss are the major characteristics of AIDS, which is the end stage of HIV disease (Encarta Encyclopedia, Standard Edition, 2005). It is advised that practices that increase the likelihood of blood contact such as sharing tooth brush, razor, shaving stick, nail cutter and hair clipper should be avoided. In Africa, other modes of transmission of the pandemic include: harmful cultural practices such as female circumcision, alleviating poverty through prostitution (trading in sex), attributing HIV/AIDS to witchcraft and shunning HIV/AIDS control measures such as refusing to identify one’s HIV status.

The implication of all these is that in sub-Sahara Africa (Nigeria inclusive), unprotected sexual behaviours have been identified as the most prevalent mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS. This means that the most sexually active sector (18-45 years) of our population is being cut down at their prime age. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the impact of HIV/AIDS television campaigns on sex workers in Awka metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

One would have thought that the activities of sex workers and their numerous clients would have been reduced to the barest minimum, if not completely eradicated, giving the several HIV/AIDS messages which the media carry on daily basis and the devastating destruction which the disease bequeath to humanity. On the contrary, commercial sex activities and the trade of the sex machines continue to blossom in cities like Awka and Asaba in Anambra and Delta States (respectively) of Nigeria.

Several female workers engage in their chosen business in Amansea area of Awka in Anambra State and Cable Point and its environs in Asaba Delta State (to name a few places).

On daily basis, the broadcast medium of television amongst numerous communication media air commercials intended to discourage high risk behaviours of HIV/AIDS (unsafe, illicit sex). The aim of these campaigns is to protect people from engaging in behaviours that could make them contract the life-damaging immune deficiency virus (HIV), but the more these media commercials are run, the more commercial sex activities appear to be increasing, especially among youths between the ages of 15 and 25. The hard economic situation in the country may not be unconnected to this development. That governments all over the world, government agencies, parastatals, international organisations and non-governmental bodies the world over would continue to doll out billions of naira to combat the greatest malady of our time, HIV/AIDS and yet the activities that contribute most to the spread of the pandemic, namely; commercial sex or sex for selfish gain keeps thriving by day is a problem worth investigating. So, it is this problem that this study set out to look into.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

- To find out whether commercial sex workers in Awka are aware of HIV/AIDS television campaigns.
- To find out whether commercial sex workers consider abstinence from sex as an effective message in HIV/AIDS control.
- To determine the HIV/AIDS campaign the commercial sex workers think is the most effective one.
- To find out why the business is thriving despite the risk involved.

Research Questions

The following questions have been designed to guide the study:

- Are commercial sex workers in Awka aware of HIV/AIDS television campaigns?
- Do commercial sex workers consider abstinence from sex as an effective message in the control of HIV/AIDS?
- What HIV/AIDS campaigns do commercial sex workers consider to be the most effective?
- Why do commercial sex workers engage in the risky commercial sex business?

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the agenda setting theory and the individual differences theory. As noted by Asemah (2011, p.176) agenda setting theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973. The major assumption of the theory is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most

of the issues we discuss, are based on what we have read, listen to or watched in different mass media. The media make us to think about certain issues, they make us to think that certain issues are more important than others in our society. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2009) agenda setting theory of the media proposes that the public agenda or what kinds of things people talk about, think or worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicise. The theory is relevant to the study because the HIV/AIDS campaigns messages in the media form the basis of what the public, including the commercial sex workers, would be thinking about and discussing. The media, therefore, set health agenda for the public to follow.

The individual differences theory holds that as individuals are different, so are their differences in the way they react to media messages. In this theory, even when the audience is made up of people from the same social category, there are individual unique characteristics, which affect the extent of reaction to a message. A message that creates happiness in one audience may generate sadness in another. This theory has a lot of relevance to the study in the sense that commercial sex workers are likely to react differently to media campaigns on HIV/AIDS. This is because the sex machines have individual, unique characteristics which would affect the extent of reaction to a given media message. No two individuals are the same. Therefore, no two individuals would react exactly the same way to a given media message.

Review of Related Literature

The mass media have been used all around the world as tools in the combat against HIV/AIDS (Liskin, 1990; Myhre and Flora, 2000). Although, there have been theoretical debates on how and why mass media communications influence behaviour, there is considerable empirical evidence showing that the mass media can be used for attitude and behavioural changes associated with HIV/AIDS (Benefo, 2004). Mass media HIV/AIDS campaigns, as noted by Mahre and Flora (2000) utilise multiple channels of delivery. Those that employ television media appear to be most cost-effective, as television broadcasts reach the majority of the population. Television campaigns usually yield the strongest impact in terms of HIV/AIDS awareness, transmission of knowledge, interpersonal communication and behavioural change, as opposed to campaigns, using other channels, such as radio or print media (Sood and Nambiar, 2006).

The educational role of mass media, as noted by Bertrand, O' Realy, Denison, Anhang and Sweat (2006) as a whole is crucial, as HIV/AIDS communication is most often received from this channel, rather than from interpersonal sources. Moreover, there is evidence that mass media exposure may promote interpersonal communications about HIV/AIDS. Although, mass media campaigns have shown improvements in knowledge of HIV transmission, their implications for HIV-related discrimination are not well documented. This is unfortunate, since HIV/AIDS related stigma has been identified as a key barrier to fighting the epidemic. Using the media therefore becomes a powerful way of reaching large numbers of young people with HIV and AIDS information and prevention messages. However, measuring the extent to which media-based AIDS education reaches young people, and the effect that it has

is often difficult. As noted by Singh (2006,), the task before visual and non-visual vehicles or media, besides creating awareness and providing knowledge base about HIV/AIDS, is also to remove the misconceptions about the transmission of the virus and the social ostracism of affected persons. Lack of information leads to denial and rejection of PLWHA at personal and societal levels as the mankind, at large have not yet realised that even they are carrying the risk of contracting HIV and thus, AIDS is not an issue for 'others'.

The media, as noted by Singh (2006) have the potential to create widespread awareness on HIV/AIDS, to promote the positive attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS and influencing people to change high risk behaviour that make them vulnerable to the infection. It has a pivotal role to play in a fight against AIDS. It is a well known saying that “education is the vaccine against AIDS”. An effective media can raise the awareness level and can also bring about sustainable behaviour change, thereby reducing vulnerability to the virus. Media are capable of performing the following roles in preventing HIV/AIDS:

- A Channel for communication and Discussion: One of the roles of Media is to open the channels for communication and foster discussions about HIV and interpersonal relations. Addressing HIV/AIDS in the entertainment programmes can have an enormous impact on the society at risk.
- A vehicle for Creating a supportive and enabling environment: Mass media can be instrumental in breaking the silence that envelopes the disease and in creating an encouraging behaviour for combating with existing social norms and making positive changes in the society.
- Facilitator for removing stigma and discrimination attached with the disease: HIV/AIDS afflicted individuals, besides the anatomical discomforts undergo the mental suffering of stigma and discrimination at the hands of the society memers. A number of media campaigns have focused on the need to overcome prejudice and encourage solidarity with people infected/affected by virus. World Health Organisation (WHO) has various extraordinary stories of HIV people who are not only fighting the virus, but are also playing an integral role in prevention of AIDS.
- A tool for creating a knowledge base for HIV/AIDS related services: The collaborative efforts of all modes of media in association with NGOs, State organisations, service providers have brought to the lime light, the availability and source of beneficial services like counseling, testing and condom provisions, treatment and social care. The broadcasters and print media have a specific role to play as their efforts have tremendous recall value.
- Education through entertainment: For creating an efficacious awareness about HIV/AIDS, the messages need to be informative, educative as well as entertaining, as these are mutually exclusive.
- Mainstreaming: Broadcasters are mainstreaming the HIV issue across a number of programmes, ensuring that the message permeates a diverse range of output, not just outlets and public service messages dedicated specifically to the issue. The fact that the virus affects all sections of the society is reinforced in such a way that many people who might not pay attention to a traditional AIDS

campaign or who do not choose to watch AIDS campaigns, are exposed to HIV/AIDS messages. A coordinated, multifaceted campaign has greater impact than a single programme.

Method of Study

The survey research approach was adopted. The population of the study is made up of 69 commercial sex workers that conduct their trade at the Amansea end of the Ifite road in Awka, Anambra State. The figure was given by the first Lady of the sex workers (the name they call their chairperson or spokesperson). A sample of 50 sex machines was considered appropriate for the study and purposive sampling technique was adopted in determining the actual sex workers to be issued the instrument. Structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Data obtained was presented in frequency distribution tables and analysis was done using simple percentage method.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered to 50 respondents only. Out of the 50 copies of questionnaire distributed, only 47 were returned and only 44 copies were found usable, while the remaining three (3) copies were not usable.

Table I: Provision of information on commercial sex workers’ awareness of HIV/AIDS television campaigns.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	37	89
No	5	11
Total	44	100

Table I shows the distribution of respondents in terms of the awareness of HIV/AIDS campaigns. Thirty nine (89%) agreed that they were aware of television campaigns on HIV/AIDS, while 5% respondents (11%) said that they were not aware of HIV/AIDS campaigns on television. This indicates that majority of the respondents are aware of the HIV/AIDS campaigns on television. The import of this data is that the answers provided are accurate and relevant, because the respondents were aware of the campaigns.

Table II: Provision of information on whether the respondents consider abstinence from sex as an effective HIV/AIDS control campaign.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	2	4.5
No	42	95.5
Total	44	100

Out of the 44 respondents who returned their questionnaire 4.5% (n = 2) agreed that total abstinence from sex is considered a good approach to HIV/AIDS control. However, majority of the respondents disagreed, saying that total abstinence is not an effective approach to HIV/AIDS control. Those who said “no” represented 95% (n=42). The implication of this finding is that most commercial sex workers do not think that total abstinence should be part of the control measures against HIV/AIDS spread.

Table III: Provision of information on the HIV/AIDS campaign which the respondents consider most effective

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Use of condom	42	95.5
Faithful to a partner	0	0
Avoiding casual sex	0	0
Total	42	95.5

The table above shows that all the 42 respondents (95.5%) who rejected abstinence as the best form of HIV/AIDS control campaign chose the campaign on the use of condom as the most effective or best approach to HIV/AIDS control. Majority of the respondents indicated knowledge of the fact that the use of condom may not guarantee 100 percent safety from the dreaded HIV virus, but said they prefer the use of condom since they cannot avoid sex.

Table IV: Provision of information on why commercial sex business is thriving despite the risks involved.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Economic hardship	16	36
Family problem	21	48
Abandonment	7	16
For the joy of it	0	0
Total	44	100

Table four above reveals that the major reason why commercial sex trade is thriving borders on family related problems; 48% (n=21) respondents affirmed this. This is followed by economic hardship (n=16 or 26%). Seven respondents (or 16%) said that they joined commercial sex business because they were abandoned. No sex machine agreed to have joined the business for the fun or joy of it.

Discussion of Findings

Findings show that commercial sex workers were aware of HIV/AIDS television campaigns. There is strong evidence that they were not only aware of the ads, but also were exposed to such campaigns; 89% of them affirmed this fact.

Findings also reveal that commercial sex workers do not see total abstinence from sex as effective means of HIV/AIDS control. Majority of them assert that total abstinence from sex is not possible. The import of this finding is that sex workers are not willing to stay away from sex as that would amount to abandoning their business.

Another major finding made in this study is that commercial sex workers believe that the “use the condom” campaign is the best approach to HIV/AIDS control. The implication of this finding is that sex workers would rather use condom than abstaining from sex. Commercial sex workers are aware that condom use could not guarantee 100% HIV/AIDS free sexual intercourse.

The study found that family crisis (problem) is a chief factor that encourages commercialised sex. This is because majority of the respondents point to family problems as being the major issue that led them into the sex industry. Findings equally show that economic hardship and abandonment were factors that also encourage the illicit business to thrive. Findings of the study show that commercial sex workers do not go into the business for the joy or fun of it. No sex machine admitted engaging in the business because she enjoys sex.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Commercial sex workers are aware of HIV/AIDS television campaign and are exposed to such campaigns, but as a result of poverty and other factors, they engage in sex work. Based on these findings therefore, the paper concludes that HIV/AIDS campaigns do not positively affect the sex workers. The paper makes the following recommendations: HIV/AIDS messages must be well planned and packaged in order to make them more effective; in designing HIV/AIDS messages, the norms, values, beliefs and general way of life of the target audience must be scientifically studied and taken into account, so that the message would be both meaningful and acceptable to them; government should address the rising problem of unemployment and other economic hardships that tend to lure the youths into commercial sex business; social problems such as child trafficking, kidnapping and rape which harbour great opportunity for unsafe sex should equally be addressed by the government; religious organisations could be used as agents of social mobilisation to address the rising cases of family unrest with a view to making the family a safe home for inculcating sound morals on youths; considering the limitation of the mass media in changing people’s attitude and behaviour it is strongly recommended that interpersonal media should be used more to influence people’s attitude and behaviour about sex. Such interpersonal media should essentially be through seminars, workshops and meetings.

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