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Students' sexual exposure in tertiary institutions: a case study of some universities in Abia state of Nigeria

E. E. Enwereji¹*, E. I. Akubugwo², J. O. Onwuka³, D. C. Ckikezie⁴

¹Department of Public Health, College of Medicine, ²Department of Biochemistry, ³Department of Sociology, ⁴Department of Statistics, Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria

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*Correspondence: Dr. E. E. Enwereji,

E-mail: hersng@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Studies have shown that new entrants in institutions of higher learning are at risk of sexual exploits by older students. Drama has been identified as an intervention strategy capable of internalizing both the emotional and cognitive dimensions of sexual problems for positive changes. This study used drama to create awareness on likely common sexual exploits in institutions of higher learning.

Methods: Study used first year students in three universities, federal, state and private. It was assumed that first year students in institutions of higher learning are likely to be exposed to sexual overtures by older students. It was considered that using drama as an intervention will create awareness on types of sexual overtures experienced in tertiary institutions. A random sample of ninety ((90) students, comprising thirty (30) students in each of the universities studied was selected. Pre- and post-self-administered questionnaire were given to the selected students to complete. On completion, copies of the questionnaire (pre- and post) were analyzed using Tables and percentages.

Results: The study showed that students in the three universities studied were approached for sex by fellow students but this was more in Rhema University 8 (28. 8%) than in other universities. Both male and female sexes approached the students for sex. Finding showed that some students practiced anal, oral, and multiple sex, but this was more in MOUA 10 (33.3%) than in ABSU and Rhema with 9 (30%) respectively. For knowledge on how HIV is transmitted, students had the knowledge that HIV transmission occurs by sharing sharp objects. This knowledge was more among students in MOUA 29 (97%) than those in ABSU 28 (93%) and Rhema 27 (90%).

Conclusions: Drama therefore, is a valuable and timely intervention strategy capable of encouraging HIV risk reduction among university students.

Keywords: Sex partners, Condom, HIV, Allegory, Sexual violence

INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown that adolescents, especially females in institutions of higher learning are at risk of sexual violence. At times, female students may be coerced by the males into sexual relationships against their wishes. In this way, respect for women's autonomy in decision-making about their health is denied. As such, most

females do not seek intervention on some salient sexual problems they encounter while on campus because of stigmatization. ^{8,9} Using condoms for sex has been a source of conflict in adolescents' sexual relationships. ^{10,12} Having sex without a condom was a necessary condition for the female sex partners to receive material goods and/or financial assistance from male sex partners. ^{13,14} Adolescent HIV risk-reduction strategy should be based predominately on abstinence. There is need to support

abstinence for the overall sexual health of women in HIV prevention, particularly with respect to the prevention of pregnancy and other sexually transmitted infections. ¹⁵⁻¹⁸

Studies have estimated that 17.8 million women were living with HIV in 2015, constituting 51% of all adults living with HIV. Adolescent girls and young women were particularly affected in 2015 and they constituted 60% of young people aged 15–24 years who were living with HIV. They also accounted for 58% of new HIV infections among young persons in that age group. ¹⁹⁻²¹

Drama and role-playing methods are common intervention strategies used in the prevention of HIV and AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted infections in secondary schools, but evidence for their use in tertiary institutions is limited. Drama helps to identify behaviours that modify attitudes for positive change.

Drama is a valuable intervention strategy that could reduce the current practice of men having sex with men and women having sex with women in most institutions of high learning. This is because performing on the stage allows individuals to experience rational and holistic approaches that could offer solutions to problems. The strategy of the strat

Students in Nigerian high institutions are at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections STIs, including HIV as a result of multiple and unprotected sexual activities. New intakes in particular, are at higher risk of multiple sex partners. The older students rush to engage them as girl and boy friends. Most times, people living with HIV believe that, since they are already infected, there may not be need to practice safer sex by using condom with other HIV-positive partners. They therefore indulge in unprotected sex which could put them at risk of being infected with other STIs besides HIV. The same is applicable to "magnetic couple" or "sero-discordant" (those in which one partner is HIV-positive and the other HIV-negative). 39-42 This study used drama and role play to provide emotional and cognitive experiences on the consequences of sexual risk behaviours in tertiary institutions.

METHODS

The study lasted for three months August –October 2016. A cross- sectional observational research design was used. Three universities, one private, one State and the other Federal were studied. The three universities are Michael Okpara University of Agriculture (MOUA), representing Federal university, Abia state university (ABSU), representing State University, and Rhema University, representing private university. All the three universities received intervention in the form of drama which lasted for three weeks and each episode was for an hour. The drama was provided by a Consultant. The consultant and his group used drama programme that adopted allegory to give a symbolic narrative of what

happens in the universities to new students. This helped to create awareness on the need to reduce risk behaviours in the universities. The drama also initiated catharsis by creating pity and fear that motivated the students to avoid taking the risk of penetrative sex.

A pretest to perfect the drama was conducted. Before the drama, pre-intervention questionnaire which was self-administered was distributed to the respondents by the researchers. This was to note the knowledge base of the students. Thereafter, the drama intervention was provided to the students in their respective university campuses. This guaranteed that the students in each of the campuses of the university received process drama where imaginary world was used to highlight effects of taking sexual risks among students. At the end of the intervention, a self-administered post-intervention questionnaire was also distributed by the researchers. This helped to evaluate the extent to which the drama used created awareness on HIV and AIDS risk-reduction practices.

In this study, drama was used as a means of promoting change that served cathartic and performative roles. In the cathartic role, actors produced drama on the problems under study and allowed the students to identify with the characters in the drama so as to enable them act as change agents. For the performative role, the students mimicked the actors and used the drama techniques to portray life experiences in the campuses.

Ninety (90) students, comprising 30 students from each of the universities were used for the study. The students were selected by quota and simple random sampling with replacement. The pre-intervention and post-intervention responses were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively using Tables and percentages.

Study area

The study area is Abia state in South East Nigeria. Abia state is made up of 17 local government areas. It has a population of 2.7million (2006 Nigerian census report).

There are 9 tertiary institutions comprising 3 universities (Federal, State and Private), 2 polytechnics, 2 teacher training institutes and 2 schools of health. All the universities in the state, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture (MOUA), representing federal university, Abia State University, representing state university, and Rhema University, representing private university were used for the study.

Abia State has 3 commercial cities Aba, Umuahia and Arochuku. These cities are densely populated. Inhabitants of Abia State are made up of artisans, traders, farmers, civil and public servants. Individuals in Abia state receive health care services from a teaching hospital, four general hospitals, seven primary health care centres and a host of private hospitals.

Ethical consideration

Ethical Review Committees of the Abia State University approved the project before the commencement of the study. After the approval from the ethical committee, informed consent was sought and obtained from the Dean of Students' Affair of the three universities studied as well as that of the students.

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 1 contains the demographic characteristics of the students.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Characteristics	MOUA (%)	ABSU (%)	Rhema (%)	Total (%)
Sex				
Female	11 (37)	23 (77)	25 (83)	59 (66)
Male	19 (63)	7 (23)	5 (17)	31 (34)
Total	30 (100)	30 (100)	30 (100)	90 (100)
Age range				
Less than 20 years	5 (17)	15 (50)	21 (70)	41 (46)
20-25 years	21 (70)	15 (50)	9 (30)	45 (50)
26-30 years	3 (10)	0	0	3 (3)
31-35 years	0	0	0	0
36 years and above	1 (3)	0	0	1 (1)
Total	30 (100)	30 (100)	30 (100)	90 (100)
Marital status				
Single	30 (100)	27 (90)	28 (93)	85 (95)
Married	0	2 (7)	0	2 (2)
Separated	0	1 (3)	2 (7)	3 (3)
Divorced	0	0	0	0
Total	30 (100)	30 (100)	30 (100)	90 (100)

Table 2: Students who were approached for sexual relationships.

	Institutions					
Approached for	MOUA		ABSU		RHEMA	
sexual	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
relationship	intervention	intervention	intervention	intervention	intervention	intervention
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Yes	5 (17)	4 (13)	2 (7)	5 (17)	8 (28. 8)	7 (26)
No	25 (83)	26 (86.7)	27 (93)	24 (83)	20 (71.2)	20 (74)
Total	30 (100)	30 (100)	29 (100)	29 (1900)	28 (100)	27 (100)

From the Table, Rhema and ABSU as private and State universities respectively had more female students than MOUA which is a federal university. Also students in MOUA were older than those in ABSU and Rhema. However, students in Rhema University were younger in age than those in MOUA and ABSU respectively. On the whole, a total of 31 (34%) males and 59 (66%) females between the ages of 20-35 years were studied in the three universities chosen. Majority of the students studied were single. In ABSU, 3 (10%) were married, while 2 (7%) were separated/divorced in Rhema, 2 (7%) of the students were separated/divorced while in MOUA all the students studied were single. See Table 1 for more details.

Students' sexual exposure in school

The respondents were asked whether they have been approached for sexual relations by fellow students. The

responses from the students showed that some students were approached for sex in the three universities studied. See Table 2 for more details.

From Table 2, more students in Rhema University than in other Universities were approached for sexual relationships by fellow students.

Further investigation was made on the gender of those who approached the students for sexual relationships. The responses of the students are contained in Table 3.

From Table 3, students from Rhema University were approached for sexual relations by both male and female students more than students from MOUA and ABSU.

When the average number of students that approached the students was examined, it was noticed that in MOUA an average of 2 students, in ABSU, average of 5 students, while in Rhema, an average of 9 students approached the students for sexual relationship. This shows that students in Rhema University were approached for sexual relationship more than students in other institutions.

The number of students who indulged in sexual intercourse was explored in each of the universities studied. The responses are contained in Table 4.

Table 3: Gender that approached students for sexual relationship.

Candon that	Institutions						Total
Gender that approached	MOUA		ABSU		Rhema Unive	rsity	
students for	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	
sex	intervention	intervention	intervention	intervention	intervention	intervention	
SCA	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	
Males only	3 (10)	2 (7)	2 (7)	5 (17)	8 (27)	9 (30)	29 (33)
Females only	3 (10)	1 ((3)	0	0	3 (10)	2 (7)	11 (12)
Both sexes	0	0	0	0	2 (7)	3 (10)	5 (7)
Total	6 (20)	3 (10)	2 (7)	5 (17)	13 (43)	14 (47)	45 (50)

Table 4: Students who had sexual intercourse by institution.

Had sex intercourse	MOUA (%)	ABSU (%)	Rhema (%)	Total (%)
Yes	10 (33.3)	9 (30)	9 (30)	28 (31)
No	20 (66.7)	21 (70)	21 (70)	62 (69)
Total	30 (100)	30 (100)	30 (100)	90 (100)

Table 5: Knowledge on methods of HIV transmission by institution.

	Institutions					
Awareness of HIV	MOUA		ABSU		RHEMA	
transmission	Pre-intervention	Post-inter	Pre-intervention	Post-inter	Pre-intervention	Post-inter
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Hugging	1 (3)	1 (3)	0	0	1 (3)	0
Public toilet	4 (13)	4 (13)	3 (10)	3 (10)	1 (3)	2 (7)
Sharing food	1 (3)	0	0	0	0	1 (3)
Sharing razor blades	27 (90)	29 (97)	28 (93)	28 (93)	26 (87)	27 (90)
Using same bath towel	3 (10)	6 (20)	1 (3)	1 (3)	0	0
By kissing	7 (23)	10 (33)	6 (20)	4 (13)	7 (23)	11 (37)
Any other	13 (43)	6 (20)	11 (37)	7 (23)	12 (40)	15 (50)
(unprotected sex)	15 (45)	0 (20)	11 (37)	1 (23)	12 (40)	13 (30)

Note: Multiple answers expected.

The result showed that a total of 28 (31%) of students in MOUA, ABSU, and Rhema had sexual intercourse. See Table 4 above for details. When the types of favour the students got from sex partners were enquired, 1 (3%) of the students in MOUA said that money was the favour received, in ABSU 1 (3%) said the favour received was books, while in Rhema 1 (3%) said cloths were the favour received.

Knowledge of methods of HIV transmission

Later, the knowledge of how HIV can be transmitted was enquired from the students. From their responses, a good proportion of the students were aware that HIV is mainly transmitted by sharing of sharp objects. See Table 5 for details.

Knowledge on methods of HIV prevention

Students' knowledge on methods of preventing HIV infection was examined in each of the universities studied. The students' responses are contained below.

The responses in Table 6 showed that some of the students were not aware of any method of HIV prevention. From this Table, a total of 19 (63%) students in Rhema University more than those from other Universities were not aware of any method of HIV prevention.

The methods of sexual intercourse the students engaged in were demanded the students' responses are contained in Table 7.

Table 6: Students' knowledge on methods of preventing HIV infection.

	Institutions						
Awareness on HIV Prevention	MOUA		ABSU		Rhema		
methods	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-inter	
methous	intervention	interventio	intervention	intervention	intervention	(%)	
	(%)	n (%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(70)	
Using lubricants during sex	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Using microbicides during sex	0	2 (7)	0	0	0	0	
Taking drugs after sex	0	3 (10)	0	0	0	0	
Using condoms for sex	4 (13)	13 (43)	7 (23)	11 (37)	8 (27)	7 (23)	
Not aware of any above	14 (47)	13 (43)	17 (57)	11 (37)	19 (63)	19 (63)	
Abstinence	10 (33)	11 (37)	8 (27)	8 (27)	6 (20)	11 (37)	

Note: Multiple answers expected.

Table 7: Students and methods of sexual intercourse undertaken.

	Institutions					
Methods of	MOUA		ABSU RHEMA			
Sexual intercourse	Pre-intervention	Post-	Pre-intervention	Post-	Pre-intervention	Post-
	(%)	inter (%)	(%)	inter (%)	(%)	inter (%)
Anal sex	1 (3)	5 (17)	-	1 (3)	-	1 (3)
Oral sex	0	0	1 (3)	3 (10)	0	0
Sex without condom	15 (50)	15 (50)	20 (67)	20 (67)	23 (77)	23 (77)
Sex with condom	3 (10)	3 (10)	1 (3)	1 (3)	2 (7)	2 (7)
Sex with many partners	3 (10)	1 (3)	2 (7)	3 (10)	2 (7)	3 (10)

Note: Multiple answers expected.

From the responses in Table 7, the students had oral, anal and multiple sexual activities. Also a good proportion of the students, 15 (50%) in MOUA, 20 (77%) in ABSU, and 23 (77%) in Rhema admitted they had sex without condom.

DISCUSSION

The knowledge on methods of HIV transmission showed that a good proportion of the students, about 90% of them were aware that sharing sharp objects like razor blade, syringes and others as cultists and drug addicts do, could predispose individuals to HIV infection. The fact that some of the students chose methods like using public toilets, sharing bath towels, hugging and others as methods of HIV transmission shows that some of them are still ignorant of the correct methods of HIV transmission.

In exploring the students' knowledge on the strategies to prevent HIV infection, 50% of students condemned the use of condoms as a preventive strategy. About 40% of the students viewed abstinence as a better strategy for preventing HIV infection than other strategies, showing that with increased intervention, a good proportion of the students would adopt abstinence as the best strategy for HIV prevention. This finding agrees with earlier studies. ^{6,8,12}

Furthermore, the level to which HIV risk reduction practices varied among students in the institutions studied was examined. The result showed that students in Rhema University practiced HIV risk reduction more than others. This was shown by the proportion of students in Rhema who avoided having sexual intercourse as well as the number who opted for abstinence as the best option for HIV prevention. This finding could be attributed to the view that as a private University, moral instructions may be regularly given to the students to increase their chastity as against what is obtainable in Federal and State Universities.

That some of the students said they had anal, oral and multiple sex showed the extent to which they are at risk of sexually transmitted infections especially HIV. Students in tertiary institutions are sexually active and as such, need intervention to protect them from such infections. The idea of providing intervention to protect students from HIV infection agrees with earlier findings.^{7,8}

The finding that some of the students had sex without condom suggests risk to HIV infection. In this study, some students claimed lack of knowledge on methods of HIV transmission as well as that of prevention. This was shown by the students' responses to methods of HIV transmission where "using same towel," "sleeping together" and "using same toilet" were termed as risks for HIV infection. These responses from the students depict

the idea that some of the students are ignorant of the basic facts about HIV infection, probably due to lack or insufficient HIV training. That the students of MOUA, as a federal university, used condom during sex more than other students shows the extent to which the students are familiar with condom use. It is likely that a good number of the students in this university practiced sexual intercourse with condom use. This is a preventive measure against HIV infection.

Drama intervention in the study generated positive effects to the students. It was noted that after the drama, a good number of the students started using allegory from the drama to emphasize positive moral qualities among peers. This was noticed by the number of students who continuously recited the theme of the drama "just once, one casual sex". Using the slang "just once, one casual sex" motivated a good number of the students to acquire proficiency in using literal languages from the drama to act as change agents to peers. Also students used gestures to send sensitive messages that are capable of preventing sexual risk behaviours in higher institutions of learning. This enabled the students to avoid using irony in HIV prevention messages to peers. This practice possibly increased the students' knowledge of the correct methods of HIV risk reduction practices.

CONCLUSION

Drama helped to highlight behaviours that can predispose students to sexually transmitted infections including HIV. From the findings, drama initiated emotional feelings that created awareness on the consequences of sexual risk taking among the students. Drama therefore, is a valuable and timely intervention strategy that is capable of discouraging sexual risk taking among university students.

The fact that some students had shrouded knowledge on methods of HIV transmission and prevention, calls for more enlightenment on the methods of HIV transmission. Therefore, more research on HIV awareness creation is recommended for university students.

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Institutional Ethics Committee

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