

## Knowledge, attitude and practices of undergraduate students towards HIV counselling and testing in a private university at Ogun State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** HIV and AIDS has remained the most serious infectious disease posing a challenge to public health globally. Despite numerous campaigns for HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) in Nigeria, only a few numbers of young people utilize this service. This study assessed the level of knowledge, attitude and practice of undergraduate students towards HIV Counselling and Testing in Ogun State. The research design used was a descriptive survey method which utilized a self-designed questionnaire to elicit information from 138 respondents selected through simple random sampling technique. Study findings showed that majority (72.5%) of the students have heard about HIV Counselling and Testing, however only 56.5% respondents have utilized HIV Counselling and Testing services. Also there was a positive attitude towards HIV Counselling and Testing (86.2%). Nevertheless, a statistically significant difference was observed between knowledge of HCT and Practice of HCT ( $P < 0.05$ ). Based on findings above, it could be deduced that knowledge of HIV Counselling services is a positive factor to utilisation of the services. Hence it is recommended that the content of HCT be included in general education course of all first year undergraduate students in Nigeria in order to sensitise them on the use of HCT service. This could serve as a motivating factor which would propel these students to check and also become aware of their HIV status at any given point in time.

**Keywords:** Attitude, HIV Counselling and Testing, Knowledge, Practice, Undergraduate Students.

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### I. Introduction

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has remained significant in posing major health challenges to many developing countries [1]. In Africa, Nigeria is one of the countries reported to have the highest prevalence (3.1%) after South Africa [2]. The World Health Organization estimated that between 32 million and 38 million people respectively are living with HIV and AIDS worldwide. Unfortunately, Nigeria had 3 million infected persons living with HIV and AIDS. According to Lyons [3], 60% of the affected individuals are adolescents mostly between ages 14 and 19 years. Although it was estimated that 45% of new cases globally occurred among young people who are between ages between 15 and 24 years in 2008 [4], it was also observed that these young women were more vulnerable to HIV infection than adults [5]. Factors that contributed to this increased vulnerability among young people included their age, gender and sexual orientation [6].

In order to reduce the rate at which young people and adult become infected with HIV/AIDS, HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) was identified and introduced as the key entry point to its prevention, care, treatment and support services [7]. This is because it provides individuals with the opportunity to know whether they are infected with HIV or not; provides understanding on the implications of the individual's HIV status and enables the person to make informed choices for the future [7]. According to National Agency for Control of AIDS (NACA), HCT also provides the opportunity to detect early deterioration of the immune system through evaluation of the immune system on regular basis.

Nevertheless, HCT services have not been adequately utilized by young people in Nigeria. They lack accurate and adequate information on sexual health [6]. Although sexual health education has been introduced in many secondary schools, it was observed that knowledge and attitudes of young people is still poor, hence an increase in their sexual risk taking behavior as many of them are involved in illicit sexual activities and immoral behaviors like sexual promiscuity, prostitution, rape and unprepared marriage resulting from illegal pregnancy [6]. Regardless, increase in the occurrence HIV and AIDS are promoted by the following factors: unhealthy

cultural practices, inadequate sexual health education, inadequate practice of voluntary HIV testing and counselling, and poor health care system [8].

Hence this study was intended to evaluate the knowledge, attitude and practice of HCT among Undergraduate Students in Ogun State and also to determine whether their knowledge of HCT would have a positive effect on their practice of HCT. Findings obtained from this study will add to existing body of knowledge on HIV/AIDS and prevention of its spread.

### 1.1 Objective

1. To assess the knowledge, attitude and practices of undergraduate students towards HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) in a private institution at Ogun State, Nigeria.
2. To determine whether their knowledge of HCT could have an effect on their practice of HCT.

## II. Methods

A descriptive, non-experimental research design was adopted in this study. A simple random sampling technique was used to recruit one hundred and thirty-eight participants between the ages of 15-35 years. After informed consent was obtained, questionnaires were distributed and respondents were instructed on completion of the questionnaire. Data was analysis using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17. Descriptive statistics was used to present data in frequencies and percentage. Test of hypothesis was done using inferential statistics of chi-square and was set at 0.05 level of significant.

## III. Results

### 3.1 Demographic characteristics of the participants

One hundred and thirty-eight undergraduate students participated in this study. The mean age of participants was 21.48 years (SEM 0.69). 48.6% respondents were males while 51.4% were females. Majority of the respondents (39%) were in 300 level. 72% were Christians while 28% were Muslims. All participants reported not married.

**Table 1: Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of HCT (n=138)**

Variable	Question	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Knowledge	Have you ever heard about HCT?	Yes	100	72.5
		No	38	27.5
	Where did you get your information about HCT?	School	58	42
		Friends	13	9.4
		Radio	25	18.1
TV posters		36	26.2	
Do you know where you can get HCT services?	Yes	90	65.2	
	No	48	34.8	
Attitude	HCT is important for prevention of HIV transmission?	Yes	119	86.2
		No	19	13.8
	Is Counselling important for HCT?	Yes	126	91.3
		No	12	8.7
	Everybody who is sexually active needs HCT	Yes	74	53.6
No		64	46.4	
Practice	Have you ever used HCT services?	Yes	78	56.5
		No	60	43.5
	If yes how do you rate the service?	Good	49	35.5
		Bad	29	21.0
		Don't know	60	43.5
	How would you rate the confidentiality of the counselling and testing process?	Good	54	39.1
		Bad	24	17.4
		Don't know	60	43.5
	What was your reason for being tested?	Just to know my status	78	56.5

From table 1 above, findings on knowledge level shows that many (72.5%) of the undergraduate students have heard about HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT). Many got the information about HCT from their school (42%) and through watching of television (26.2%) while 18.1%, 9.4% and 4.3% came to know about HCT through radio, friends and posters respectively. Also 65.2% of the respondents claimed they knew where they could get HCT services.

Regarding their attitude towards HCT services, 86.2% respondents agreed that the HCT was important for prevention of HIV transmission. In addition, 91.3% agreed that counseling was important for HCT. However, only 53.6% of the respondents indicated that everybody who is sexually active needs HCT.

Finally on practice of HCT, only 56.5% of students have used HCT services. For those who have used the service, 35.5% claimed the service rendered was good. Also 39.1% affirmed that the confidentiality of HCT process was good while 17.4% rated the service as poor. All participants who claimed to have done HCT (56.5%) just wanted to just know their status.

Chi-square test assessing participant's knowledge of HCT and practice of HCT showed an  $X^2$  value of 0.0057 which was set at degree of freedom of 1 and level of significance of 0.05 respectively. Hence a statistically significance difference was deduced.

#### **IV. Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed that 73.5% respondents have knowledge of HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT). The source for the respondents' information included school and use of media like television, radio and poster. It is also noteworthy that friends also played a role in disseminating information on HCT probably through discussions. This indicates the importance of social relationships in the transmission of information about HIV/AIDS. Therefore, there is a need to incorporate HIV Counselling and Testing information into social networks infrastructures such as in Black berry messenger. In a similar study by McManus & Dahr [9] which evaluated the knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of adolescent school girls towards STIs and HIV and safer sex practice and sex education in India, a considerably high level of knowledge was found.

Although the results obtained in this present study also suggests that participants have a positive attitude towards HCT with about 86.2% respondents affirming that HCT was important for prevention of HIV transmission, only 53.6% respondents agreed that all sexually active people need HCT. This could be based on the assumption that HIV is mostly transmitted sexually. In addition, attitude of undergraduate students towards HCT could differ depending on the body of knowledge which they have been exposed to. Addis et al [10] in a cross-sectional study in Ethiopia found that sampled undergraduates had a positive attitude towards HCT and their practice of HCT was above average.

In line with the cross-sectional study in Ethiopia, this present study observed that only 56.5% respondents claimed to have had HCT done before. This is despite that the fact that the research setting has a teaching hospital which offers HCT services. For those who have had HCT done, 39.1% and 35.5% respondents respectively rated the confidentiality of the service as well as the HCT itself as good. This could play a major role on whether participants would recommend HCT services to other students. Also all those who affirmed having gone for HCT (58%) stated that they only wanted to know their HIV status. This indicates that there are other factors beyond the respondent's knowledge and attitude which could influence their practice of HCT. This could serve as a basis for further studies.

#### **V. Conclusion**

This study has shown that knowledge of HCT among undergraduates in Ogun state is moderately high. Although there seem to be a fairly positive attitude of HCT among the students, their practice of HCT is still poor.

#### **VI. Recommendations**

There is a need for intensive campaigns and programs on HCT and its benefits to be carried out. Peer education and social networking could also be used to promote HCT practice.

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