

The Role of Teachers in Combating HIV/AIDS in Nigeria Schools

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Abstract

This paper gave the meaning of HIV/AIDS and the meaning of Teacher Education. It also gave the history and epidemiology of HIV/AIDS as well as the historical development of teacher education in Nigeria. Such roles of teachers in combating HIV/AIDS as imparting knowledge to pupils/students on causes, effects and prevention of HIV/AIDS formed the major theme of the paper. Conclusion and recommendations on what could be done in order for teachers to perform their roles successfully in combating HIV/AIDS were made at the end of the paper

Introduction

The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a disease caused by a virus known as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (Gordon and Kloud 1989). According to Almond (1990), AIDS is not one disease but a set of diseases. This means that not all people who develop AIDS suffer from the same disease. But there are certain unusual illnesses that occur very frequently in AIDS that is why it is called a "syndrome". This syndrome is caused by a virus, which adversely affects the body's immune system, thereby making it liable to infections to which it would have normally and ordinarily been resistant.

Epidemiologically, the first cases of HIV/AIDS were reported in June 1981, when five cases of Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia (P.C.P) in homosexual men in California, U.S.A were described, (Murphy, Brook and Binhall 2000). A month after this report, the Authors said 26 other cases of unusually aggressively Kaposi Sarcoma (K.S) also in homosexual men, some of them also had P.C.P, were reported in New York. By 1983, it was clear that an outbreak of a combination of diseases known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome had occurred. In 1984, according to Allyson(1988), the agents of transmission of the syndrome was identified and named human immunodeficiency virus type one (HIV 1). In 1985, a second and new human immunodeficiency virus type 2 (HIV 2) was identified in West Africa.

The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) estimated in 1997, that over 30 million people were infected with HIV all over the world. Out of this number, over one million were children. It is noteworthy here that, in the early years of the history of HIV/AIDS, the disease was mainly confined to homosexual men, drug users and recipients of blood products. But later, it was clear that there was a light prevalence of AIDS in Africa where it was predominantly heterosexually spread.

The United Nations Department Fund for Women (2000) gave a figure of 36.1 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. An estimated 2.7 million people were said to be living with the disease in Nigeria at the end of 1999. This number ranked Nigeria the fourth in the world only after South Africa, India and Ethiopia (UNIFEM 2000). More recently, the National Policy on HIV/AIDS gave an estimate of over 3.5 million Nigerians living with the disease (F.G.N. 2002).

With this rate, something has to be done urgently to combat the spread of the disease, especially among pupils and students in Nigeria schools as the age specific distribution of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria shows that school-going (young) people are at the topmost risk. The highest HIV prevalence in 1999, according to Unifem (2000), was 8.1% among people between 20-24 years of age, 6.9% among 25-29 years of age and 4.9% for 30-34, 1.3% for ages 35-39 and 0.3% for age 40 and above.

Definition and Historical background of Teacher Education in Nigeria

Teacher Education in Nigeria is the type of educational programmes structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties. The Federal Government of Nigeria has given the following institutions, among others, to provide the required Teacher Professional Training provided they continuously meet the required minimum standards.

- (a) Colleges of Education
- (b) Faculties of Education
- (c) Institutes of Education
- (d) National Teachers Institute
- (e) Schools of Education in the Polytechnics
- (f) National Institute for Nigerian languages, and
- (g) National Mathematical Centre.

The development of Teacher Education in Nigeria cannot be divorced from the development of western education, which was pioneered by efforts of early church missionaries. The Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) provided the leadership in this direction by-funding a training institute in 1859. The institution was moved to Lagos in 1867 and to Oyo in 1896 and renamed St. Andrews College, Oyo. The Roman Catholic Mission started St Gregory College in 1876, combining teacher training with grammar school programme (Salami, 1994).

With this started the establishment of various teacher training institutes all over the Southern parts of Nigeria with colonial government showing no interest until 1882 when the first Education Ordinance was passed to oversee the activities of teachers in mission

schools. Various codes and ordinances that followed that of 1882 provided more regulations for teacher training in Nigeria.

Salami (1994) stressed that before independence, there were about 40,000 teachers in Nigeria with only 11,000 of them trained as Grade IV, III, II and I. At independence, there were about 110,000 teachers with only 39,000 of them trained as grade IV, III, II and I. Holders of Nigeria Certificate Education (N.C.E) were very few before independence, while graduate teachers were almost completely absent (Taiwo, 2003).

The Ashby Commission Report of 1960 provided the need to have more and qualified teachers in Nigeria Secondary Schools. This started the introduction of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E) courses in Nigeria, the programme was meant for the training of highly qualified, but non-graduate teachers for Nigeria secondary schools.

Taiwo (1982) mentioned that the Advanced Teachers' Colleges (as the institutions were called) were established at Lagos and Ibadan in 1962, but later transferred to Ondo in 1964 and became Adeyemi College of Education. The Author said other ones were established at Zaria in 1962, Owerri in 1963 and Kano in 1964. Today, there are almost 70 Colleges of Education to offer the lowest level of teacher training programme in Nigeria.

Some of the N.C.E. awarding institutions are also awarding B.Ed Degree to students in addition to the Institutes of Education and Faculties of Education in various universities throughout the country. A new trend in the development of teacher education was opened with the 2004 edition of the National Policy on Education, which introduced a new curriculum for students, meaning a new task for teachers. The policy has also stated that N.C.E., which used to be a middle-level teacher's certificate, is now the lowest level teacher certificate (FGN, 2004). With the widespread of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria today, teachers' role becomes enormous as they need to actively participate in combating the dreadful disease.

Teachers' Role in Combating HIV/AIDS in Nigeria

Since HIV/AIDS has now become a great problem in Nigeria reducing the life expectancy of citizens and increasing poverty rate with great adverse effect on socio-economic development of the nation, teachers must stand firmly to combat the spread of the disease in the country since every Nigeria is hoped to go through education with the introduction of the U.B.E. in Nigeria.

The introduction of sexuality education as a course in all levels of our educational institutions will help teachers to impart knowledge to pupils and students on sexual behaviour and healthy living. It is the role of teachers at primary school level to impart knowledge to pupils

on why children are not to make babies. The pupils should be made to understand that they are not yet matured, and making babies will bring shame to their families. They may be sick and die in the process and for the fear of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Abstinence from sexual intercourse should therefore, be the order of the day at this level of education.

At the Junior Secondary School level, the teachers' role is to make students understand the differences between sex, sexuality and sexual intercourse. They should also be informed on why they should not have sexual intercourse. Teachers should discuss what happens when a young boy and young girl have sexual intercourse resulting in pregnancy and S.T.I or HIV/AIDS. Teachers are to let them realize that abstinence is the best option in preventing pregnancy and HIV/AIDS.

It is at this stage that students should know what abortion is, that is, termination of pregnancy and getting rid of foetus before maturity, its adverse effects, for example, loss of blood, damage to internal organs, infertility, illness, infections, S.T.I and HIV/AIDS and death. They should, therefore, be informed on ways of preventing abortion and its occurrence, that is, abstinence from sexual intercourse and use of contraception.

It is the role of the teacher to explain what S.T.I and HIV/AIDS are to students. S.T.I stands for Sexually Transmitted Infections while HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus and AIDS means Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Examples of S.T.Is can also be discussed in the classroom, for example, gonorrhea, herpes, syphilis, cancrroids, genital warts, candidiasis and HIV/AIDS.

Ways of transmitting them include: Unprotected sexual intercourse, from infected mother to her baby, through transfusion of infected unscreened blood, through transplant of infected human tissue or organs and use of contaminated sharp objects like razor blades and syringes.

Effects of S.T.I and HIV/AIDS should be made known to students at school; some of the effects include burning sensation when urinating, irritating discharges, bristles and sores on genitals, the HIV/AIDS damages body immune system, thereby resulting in making the body incapable of fighting off infections, this results into manifestation of various illnesses and subsequent death.

The National Sexuality Curriculum for Senior Secondary School Sexuality Education has stated that it is the role of the teacher to remind students at senior secondary school level of the signs of HIV/AIDS which often absent for years, meaning that a person can infect another person without knowing he/she has been infected. Once the infection begins to break down the immune

system, the person will start to have the following symptoms that are commonly seen in someone with AIDS: rashes, diarrhea, weakness, tiredness, swollen lymph glands, fever, and loss of appetite and weight and night sweats. They should also be informed that infected teenagers will probably not develop AIDS until when they are 20 years and above and may not have any signs for years. Anytime the signs are present, the person should go to the doctor for HIV/AIDS test. The document also stated that it is the role of the teacher to provide information on HIV/AIDS testing which should be confidential for everyone including students.

The teacher is to explain the importance of testing someone for HIV/AIDS, that is, it is the only sure way to know if someone is infected with HIV/AIDS because one cannot determine who has HIV/AIDS by mere looking at the person. It is therefore, the role of the teacher who suspects that a student has contacted HIV/AIDS, to counsel such student to do the following: Stop having sexual intercourse immediately, consult a doctor, use prescribed drugs; refer sexual intercourse partner (s) to a doctor.

It is also the role of the teachers in higher institutions to instruct their students on those sexual behaviours that do not pose the risk of HIV/AIDS. Such behaviours include masturbation and hugging that do not involve exposure to body fluid and proper use of lubricated condoms with a tip, along with spermicidal.

Teachers are to visit medical centres and Education Resource Centres to seek Audio-Visual Aids to be used in the classroom while giving instruction on HIV/AIDS. Such Audio -visual Aids include pictures, charts, video films and projectors showing causes of HIV/AIDS, its effect on people that have contacted the disease and prevention of the diseases should be shown to the students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

HIV is a virus which destroys the body's immune system while AIDS is the full range of infections and diseases that manifest as the immune system is gradually destroyed. HIV, therefore, leads to AIDS. The combination of HIV and AIDS has become a devastating health hazard creating a big threat to Nigerians life expectancy, hence a threat to National development. Its manifestation is at every nook and cranny of the country. To avoid the country being taken over by the disease in due course, therefore, teachers' role in combating the disease cannot be over-emphasized. Allyson (1988) succinctly stated that what teacher can do at school to combat HIV/AIDS is to inform children about facts on HIV/AIDS as no child over the age of ten should be kept in ignorance "for his own good". The author said they should know about causes, infections and protection against HIV/AIDS. Some of these causes, infections and protections that the teacher should make known to the students are discussed above.

For teachers to play their role successful in combating HIV/AIDS, the following recommendations are made: there should be a core course on S.T.I and HIV/AIDS to be offered (compulsorily) by pupils and students at every level of

education. This would give the pupils enough knowledge on HIV/AIDS right from elementary to higher level of education in Nigeria. A special course on methodology of teaching the prevention of HIV/AIDS should be introduced in Nigeria teacher training institutions. This would enable the teachers in training to have good knowledge of imparting facts about causes, prevention and manifestation of HIV/AIDS to the future leaders.

The practicing teacher should be made to go on compulsory seminar/workshop on causes and prevention of HIV/AIDS. This would enable them to update their knowledge on the subject matter.

Teaching of items on HIV/AIDS should be made real through the use of appropriate Audio-Visual materials. This would further support the fact that "HIV/AIDS is real" in Nigeria.

If these recommendations are implemented, it is hoped that the teachers will be able to perform their roles successfully in combating HIV/AIDS and the spread of the disease will be minimized thereby reducing the effect of the disease as a threat to national development in a developing country like Nigeria.

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