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TOPIC:
SEX EDUCATION:
A VALUABLE TOOL IN REDUCING HIV
TRANSMISSION AMONGST THE YOUTHS

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Title

Sex Education:
A Valuable Tool in Reducing HIV Transmission Amongst The Youths
Dedication

This work is dedicated to God Almighty.
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To friends and well wishers. I appreciate you all.
Abstract

The focus of this paper is on sex education as a valuable tool in reducing the transmission of HIV amongst the youths. Sex education as a concept is one that is held with some skepticism among parents and adults. There is a general feeling and view that when children are exposed to information on sexual issues they would become very promiscuous. But with the HIV/AIDS epidemics that is threatening the existence of humanity, youths need some education on sexual matters, since they are the most sexually active segment of the society. Therefore, the concept of sexuality, sex education and the place of the youth in the control of HIV/AIDS is discussed.
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are engaging in the sexual act earlier? The answer to this question is that, an atmosphere of constant eroticism through music, dances, and teenage fashions continuously invites sex. Also the non-availability of parents to guide the adolescent is also another factor.

Sexuality is an important factor in adolescence and among the youths. Throughout these years, there is an increase in their sexual desire. This increase is not only due to biological factors but also psychological and social. Most of them engage in it to feel accepted in the group they belong and to relieve peer pressure.

In fact, they are experiencing notable changes physiologically which prepare them for more mature sexuality. But because of their inclination to be curious, they tend to experiment often with sex.

Apart from these, in the social context which include among other elements cultural traditions, fashions, the influence of communication (literature, cinema, radio, internet, advertising) etc, all these factors can repress or accentuate an adolescent urges.

In the present decades, due to various changes and transformation, the concept of sexuality is changing among the youths from what their parents used to know. Now, more than ever, sexual guidance or sex education is needed to help youths understand sexuality
INTRODUCTION

Sex! This three-lettered word connotes different thing to different people. Sex and sexual symbols abound in our society. One can find sexually explicit information or images in the movies, books, television shows, on-line programs etc. (Alters and Schiff, 1997). This all-important issue is no more treated with respect it used to be accorded in the past. For example, if one take a look at magazines or pictures, one will find attractive young men and women in advertisement for clothes, perfumes etc. This gives the impression that whether their product is clothes or perfume, advertisers and promoters know that “sex sells”. What does sex really mean to you?

The term sex refers to one’s gender, male or female as well as to sexual intercourse and certain intimate activities that involve the genitals (Alters and Schiff, 1997).

One of the most significant changes of our time is the early initiation of the sexual act, particularly among girls. In the 1960’s about 28% of 19 years old unmarried girls consummated sexual act and 65% of boys had done it. But a report of the last decade of the century talks about 80% of young girls and 85% of boys this age having done it (Melgosa, 2001). Why is it that the present day adolescents and youths
in depth. Being knowledgeable about sexuality is important for maintaining good health and optimal well-being (Alters and Schiff, 1997). Misinformation can lead to serious consequences such as unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. In a study carried out, it was discovered that new infections with HIV are occurring at a rate of almost 16,000 every day and 6 million every year (Akankogbe, O.O., Omotal, B.D., Inem, V.A., Ahmed, O.A.; and Manafa, O.U., 2003). The majority of these infections occur in people under 25 years of age. This calls for sex education amongst the youths, especially when guidance cannot come from the media or books but from adults. This will help the youths to face sexuality responsibly.

OBJECTIVES; at the end of the presentation, listeners will be able to;

1. explain concept of sex education.
2. discuss who and when to give information on sex education.
3. review of HIV/AIDS globally and in Nigeria.
4. discuss risky youths behaviours predisposing to HIV infection.
5. discuss how sex education will contribute to reduction in HIV transmission.
CONCEPT OF SEX EDUCATION

Sex education, which is sometimes called sexuality education is the process of acquiring information and forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexual identity and relationships (Forest, 2004). Sexuality education is also about developing young people's skills so that they can make informed choices about their behaviour and feel confident and competent about acting on these choices. From the foregoing, young people have a right to this education so that they can make responsible choices in sexual matters and protect themselves against abuse, sexual exploitations, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

The issue of sex education is one, which does not enjoy wide acceptance. It is not uncommon for parents to ask "if it is necessary to explain everything to children or is it not better to keep them innocent as much as is possible?" From the current trend of things, it is virtually impossible for young people to remain ignorant about issues such as sex. It is better to instruct and inform the children about something as significant and beautiful as sexuality, than leave them without guidance. According to Melgosa (2001), today as opposed to 50 years age, this innocence is virtually impossible. Sexual and erotic messages, if not
pornographic ones appear everywhere and it is difficult to escape from them.

Sex education is therefore needed, because in the words of Woolfson, R.C. in Ani, S.O, Dike, B. and Efegbere, H.A.(2000) if we avoid sex education in childhood, the subject would be taken directly to them and they will form an opinion about sex based on what they hear others say about it.

WHAT INFORMATION TO GIVE DURING SEX EDUCATION

Young people get information about sex and sexuality from various sources e.g. friends, books, media etc. some of these information may be correct and others incorrect. Providing information on sex education is therefore intended to find out what they already know and to correct misinformation about such information.

Information on the anatomy and physiology on the masculine and feminine genitalia as well as what they will experience in their own bodies should be given. Issues such as secondary sexual characteristics, menstruation, seminal emission and masturbation should be discussed. The lack of knowledge about the sexuality of the opposite sex may encourage mistaken behaviour with undesirable consequences (Melgosa,
2001). Information on reproduction, contraception and relationship should also be given.

They should also know about fertilization and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, and its incurability.

WHEN TO GIVE SEX EDUCATION

Sex education should start early before young people get to puberty and before they've developed established patterns of behaviour. It must be started from early childhood.

The exact age at which information about sex education is given should depend on the developmental stage of the child, the context as well as the understanding level.

It is good to provide information on sex education early in life. This is because they form the foundation on which more complex knowledge will be built over time. For example, they can be informed in simple terms how babies grow and change over time to become children and then adults. This provides the basis on which they understand more detailed information about puberty later on. Information about how germs and viruses attack the body given early in life could form the basis for talking to them later about infections that can be caught through sexual contact.
Forrest (2004) opined that people are afraid to talk to young people about sex and sexuality because they feel that it arouses curiosity and can lead to experimentation. But there is no evidence that this happens. It is important to note that young people store up information that can be used later in life, hence the earlier these concepts are thought the better.

**WHO SHOULD PROVIDE SEX EDUCATION**

Different settings provide different context and opportunities for sex education. At home, parents can provide discussions on issues about sex and sexuality. This tends to take place over time and involve lots of short interaction between parents and children (Steel, 1997).

At school, young people can be provided with information on sex education by their teachers.

In some countries, the involvement of young people themselves in developing and providing sex education has increased as a means of ensuring the relevance and accessibility of provision of information (Forest, 2004).

**REVIEW OF HIV/AIDS GLOBALLY AND IN NIGERIA**

AIDS is an acronym for acquired immune deficiency syndrome. It is a disease characterized by signs and symptoms of immune compromise
which affect all the systems of the body, and has brought untold suffering to humanity and a major challenge to the field of medicine.

When medical researchers discovered that AIDS was a new disease in 1981, the cause of it was unknown until 1983 when it was known to be due to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (UNAIDS/WHO 2004 reports).

HIV/AIDS has become a global epidemic, easily crossing borders and ocean. Globally, it has been estimated that more than twenty million people around the world have died of AIDS-related disease (UNAID, 2004 report). In 2004, 3.1 million men, women and children have died. Almost 40 million are now living with HIV and most of these are likely to die over the next decade. The most recent estimate indicates that in year 2004 alone 4.9 million people were newly infected with HIV (UNAIDS/WHO, 2004 reports). It is disappointing to note that the global number of people infected with HIV continue to rise despite the fact that effective prevention strategies already exist. This points to the fact that the youth and adolescent need sexual education now more than ever. According to Steel (1997), “prevention programs have contributed significantly to widespread public awareness of AIDS. The main weapon against the
epidemic will be continued prevention through education and sex education is one of such.”.

In Nigeria, the epidemic has also assumed a dynamic proportion. The situation is becoming alarming. The result of the year 2000 sero-prevalence survey indicated that HIV infection was present in all the states of the federation with a national prevalence of 5.8% (INEM, V.A.; Adedokun, A.O., and Akinkogbe, O.O; 2003). It is estimated that 3 million Nigerians between the ages of 14 – 59 years are infected with HIV in the year 2001. From the foregoing, one can say that the age cohort worst hit by the epidemic are those in their reproductive years. This assertion is in line with Nwachukwu (2000) that one of the devastating social and personal problems of the present age is the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa among the population in their reproductive age. Because the age cohort affected are those in their prime, who will bring up off-spring to perpetuate the human race, the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS on the youths, if not quickly for-stalled, would be the extinction of human race.

In many countries, 60% of all new HIV infections are among 15 – 24 years old (Forest, 2009). Nigeria being one of the developing African
countries is also at risk. Thus, the youths more than even need adequate sex education to cope with the trend of events.

Basically, HIV is transmitted in three ways

1. Sexual contact with an infected person.
2. Exposure to infected blood and blood product.
3. Placental transfer during fetal development, labour and delivery and during breast feeding (Alters and Schiff, 1997).

How HIV is not transmitted;

1. HIV is not transmitted if you work with an infected person.
2. It is not transmitted if you go to school or come in casual contact with an infected person.
3. Results of numerous studies have shown that, HIV is not transmitted by sharing such things as telephone, or drinking fountains (Alters and Schiff, 1997).
4. It is not also transmitted by sharing personal items such as towels, combs, eating utensils or dishes.

Although HIV has been detected in saliva, it does not appear to be transmitted by kissing (Alters and Schiff, 1997). A protein in the saliva attaches to the surfaces of certain white blood cells and prevent their
infection with HIV. Researchers think that this protein may hold the answer to why the HIV is not usually transmitted by saliva and why the saliva of infected persons has lower concentration of the viral load than do other body fluids e.g. semen.

**YOUTH RISKY BEHAVIOUR PRE-DISPOSING TO HIV INFECTION**

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, the term youth is being young, adolescence. Thus, it encompasses the period of adolescence which is a transition period between childhood and adulthood. Aristotle pointed out that, the adolescents are full of passion and sexual desire (Melgosa, 2001). This they explore to the fullest if adequate sex education is not given appropriately because their sexual feelings are accentuated. This is the time when established pattern of behaviour which may last a lifetime develop, and experimentation with risk behaviour begins. At this age, they tend to hang out with friends, experiment with drugs and sex. These behaviour places them at risk of contacting infections (especially STDS) including HIV. About 70% of youths in this age cohort engage in sexual intercourse before they graduate from high school, and unplanned pregnancy and STDS including HIV/AIDS continue to be major health, problem within this age cohort.
(Alters and Schiff, 1997). About one in ten teenage girls, become pregnant each year. Many of them opt for abortion criminally thus ending up in the hands of quacks, placing them at more risk.

About 2.5 million youths become infected with STDS each year (Melgosa, 2001). AIDS, which is primarily transmitted through sex, places sexually active youths at risk of becoming infected with HIV which may cause AIDS.

Another risk behaviour which places them at risk is experimentation with drugs. The term "drug" is used in a general sense to describe all substances, which alter the brain function and create dependence (Melgosa, 2001). From the definition, it is evidenced that when mental functions are altered, the individual can engage in behaviour which many place his/her health at risk, sexual practices inclusive.

These behaviours among others put the youths at risk of contracting HIV, more than any other age cohort. Because under the influence of drugs, coupled with the emotional and hormonal turmoil they are experiencing, feelings become accentuated, inhibition removed and they would engage in risky practices exposing them to HIV infection.
Another study carried out by Thang (2001) reported that it was discovered that there is an increased risk of young men having had more than one partner which pose a greater risk of acquiring HIV through sex.

These, amongst other behaviour and practices places the present day youth at risk of contacting HIV.

CONTRIBUTION OF SEX EDUCATION IN REDUCING HIV TRANSMISSION

The spread of HIV and the number of deaths from HIV/AIDS has made it imperative that the issue of sex education be taken seriously. From available statistics, it has been estimated that the number of people living with HIV are those within the age cohort below 25 years (UNAIDS WHO, 2004 reports). According to Nwachukwu (2000), one of the devastating personal and social problems of the present age is the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa among the population in their reproductive age. These calls for urgency in the provision of guidance and information on sexuality matter, which will make the present day youths to face their sexuality with responsibility.

From the global reports on AIDS, 2004, it is in Africa, in some poorest countries of the world, that the impact of the virus is severe. Altogether, there are now 16 countries in Africa in which more than one-
tenth of the adult population aged 15-49 years is infected with HIV. In seven countries, all in the southern cone of the continent, at least one adult in five is living with the virus. In Nigeria, recent statistics also shows that there is indication of HIV infection in all the states of the federation with a natural prevalence of 5.8% (Akangkogbe et al, 2003). Correct information on sexuality and sexual issues should be provided so that positive attitudes and values will be established, before children get to their youth. This will enable them to face issues of sex and sexuality responsibly.

Sex education will provide ethical moral and responsible guidance, which will help young people to apply the principles of mutual respect to the responsible use of sexuality. When there is mutual respect on sexual matters, young people can use negotiation skills to defer sex before marriage ad prevent pre-marital sex which exposes one to HIV infection.

Provision of information about the advantages and disadvantages of all sexual behaviour through sex education as well as specific risky sexual behaviour e.g. homosexuality, which predisposes them to HIV/AIDS will go a long way in reducing the incidence of new cases. With the knowledge gained from the incurable nature of disease, negative sexual attitudes and practices will change. This will reduce risky sex
practices e.g. unprotected sexual sex etc, which will invariably reduce the spread of the virus.

Forest (2004) opined that increasing the level of knowledge about sexual matters among the youths put back the average age at which they have sexual intercourse and decrease risks when they do have sex. The fact remains that since sexual intercourse (homosexual and heterosexual) is the major route of HIV transmission, when their knowledge, attitudes and practices change positively, it will also influence the rate of transmission. It has been established that what is learnt in childhood is not easily forgotten, therefore early education on sexuality issues would guide the youths in developing responsible and positive choices when it comes to sexual issues.

HIV/AIDS is a serious disease that is threatening to wipe out humanity if drastic measures are not taken. Therefore, it is imperative that every available resource be used in fighting this disease, sex education inclusive.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it is important that the issue of sex education be discussed naturally and sexuality be viewed as normal and necessary as
breathing or eating. Thus, it will not be difficult for them to assume their own sexuality responsibly.

Therefore, it is necessary to offer the youths the view that sexuality is not something of a dirty or inferior nature. They should be informed that it has its origin in the creator. When it is appreciated by the youths that it can be a blessing to well-rounded homes, they will be able to avoid premarital sex. From studies conducted, pre-marital sex is one of the means of HIV transmission and because it is becoming widely acceptable cross-culturally, parents, teachers and other stakeholders should be involved in the provision of information on sexuality early, so as to prevent the consequences of irresponsible and risky sexual act.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parents should institute sex education early in the life of children.
2. The youths should be encouraged to seek for answers to questions about sexuality from the right source.
3. The youths should be encouraged to go for voluntary counseling and testing early in life before marriage.
4. Sex education should be instituted in the schools and should be taught by qualified teacher.
5. Information about recent statistics of HIV infection should be made available to the general public for the youths to be aware of the prevalence rate in the country.

6. Superstitious beliefs about the causes of HIV/AIDS should be dispelled amongst the youth.

7. The idea that AIDS is an acronym for American Invention of Discouraging sex should be discouraged.
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